

THE BLIND SPOT

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY
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THE BLIND SPOT

B.S

B

“ Having no part dark.”—*Luke xi.* 36.

I

THE BLIND SPOT

HAVING the whole being illuminated, walking in the fulness of the light—this is the special point of the text. How many of us realise the splendid privilege? Many are wholly blind concerning spiritual realities, and many believers see only imperfectly, intermittently, partially. Of these latter we now propose to speak. We notice :

I

The fact of this partial appreciation of Divine truth.

We all know how common it is for men to have a large appreciation of the truth of Christ, and yet to have dark parts in their understanding and heart. Christian people, who in the main are very good and wise, sometimes startle us by their partial and inadequate realisation of the knowledge of Christ.

1. We see this limitation of view in the system of *doctrine* held by various believers. Take the Calvinist view of the Divine government. Surely the stern,

arbitrary view of the government of God as set forth by the thorough-going Calvinist is not a just and full statement of the glorious fact. The world owes much to the Calvinists ; they saw very clearly certain great truths and held those truths most loyally ; yet we feel sure that they did not see the whole truth—there was a dark place in their understanding, a black spot in their creed. Take the Catholic view of the Divine grace. That the redeeming God has imprisoned Himself within the Roman Catholic Church, that He can bless only through its sacraments, and that He can save only through its ministers and instrumentalities. Whatever may be good and true in such a Church, we must conclude that its members fail to compass the orb of truth in its full round of rays complete. Take the Puritan view of the Divine service. The Puritans were great and noble men, they saw with open vision great truths of liberty and righteousness, we are largely their debtors ; but when we observe how severe and sombre the service of God appears in much of their theology, we are sure that they did not fully apprehend the gospel of the glory of the happy God. And so, dear brethren, as we see other believers imperfectly apprehending the truth, there may exist a similar limitation in ourselves touching our interpretation of the Divine character, government or purpose. At this very moment some weakness or fault of our nature may be making us blind to glorious aspects of the Christian creed.

2. We see this limitation of view in the conception of *duty* formed by various believers. We all know Christians who, whilst unexceptionable in many respects, suffer from an unaccountable inadequacy of view in regard to specific morals and given branches of duty. Very defective is their conception of justice, of charity, of temperance, of honesty, of humanity, of patience, humility, gratitude, or forgiveness. They see sharply enough certain features and bearings of the truth, but other aspects and applications of the law equally essential and obligatory are quite overlooked. It is sometimes found that an artist has an excellent eye for form and outline, whilst he is, if not wholly colour-blind, seriously wanting in the sense of colour. And just so in moral life. Men will immediately recognise the obligation and delight of one phase of duty, whilst they are comparatively blind to another phase equally imperative and delightful. The unequally gifted artist makes a good sculptor, but a bad painter ; and Christian men and women who are shining examples in one direction are often painful admonitions in another.

Ah ! painfully wanting indeed. Goethe said : " If a great man has a dark place in his mind, it is very dark." We may change a word here, and say : if a good man has a dark place in his mind, it is apt to be very dark. " Who is so blind as the perfect ? " Did not Whitefield maintain that the rum trade was essential to the prosperity of America ? Did not

John Newton testify that he enjoyed sweet seasons with God whilst he was engaged in the slave trade? Does not Wendell Phillips tell how at the death of a Southern slave-holding saint his estate was sold by auction and advertised thus: "A plantation; a library, chiefly theological; twenty-seven negroes, some of them very prime; two mules, one horse, and an old wagon"? A dark corner here, verily, despite the library, chiefly theological. And so in daily life we continually meet with instances of glaring and grotesque inconsistency. We are again and again perplexed to find men who in the main are illuminated, sensitive, accurate, yet distressingly blind in some particular touching character and duty. We suffer strange confusions, miss cardinal colours out of the chromatic scale; our bodily eye does, our conscience does. Consider:

II

The causes of this partial illumination. What is the reason that Christian men fail to see the whole truth, that they lapse into deplorable errors, that they overlook directions and duties as clear to others as the noon-day? Is the reason found in some necessary limitation of the moral sense? Men's intellectual powers are always partial and imperfect; there is no such thing as absolute genius, the beholding with open vision the universality of things, and it may be

thought that there is a corresponding necessary qualification of the faculty of the individual conscience. We have seen that the sculptor who appreciates form is sometimes constitutionally incapable of appreciating colour, and it may be inferred that we are liable to suffer from a similar qualification of the moral genius. Now it is indeed impossible for any finite creature to comprehend, or see all round the infinite truths of righteousness, but it is possible for all to apprehend the whole truth, to sympathise with it in its catholicity, fulness, proportion, in its manifold beauty and splendour. No man as a philosopher may comprehend the whole truth of things, but every man may discern the moral law in all its versatility and wide-reaching, delicate applications. Christ tells us in the text that the eye is the lamp of the body, and so long as the eye is undiseased and uninjured we walk in light, but if the eye be impaired we walk in darkness and insecurity according to the degree of its imperfection; so we have an inner organ of perception and illumination, the reason—the lamp of our highest life—and everything depends upon the integrity of this organ; if it is sound and pure we walk in the light, but if it be injured, dark places appear in our mind, in our character, in our life.

The question arises, then, how may we injure the eyes of our moral understanding?

1. It may be done by *pride*. It is difficult—nay, it

is impossible—to see the fulness of the truth if we allow the warpings and discolorations of vanity, self-sufficiency and prejudice. Pride easily blinds us to the truths which most deeply and immediately concern us. We need, therefore, to beware of ecclesiastical bigotry, of theological prejudice, of intellectual prepossession and conceit. Humility, teachableness, susceptibility of soul, we must earnestly covet and pursue. The nobler souls are ever crying for the light. “That which I see not, teach Thou me.” “Teach me Thy way, O Lord.” “Teach me Thy statutes.” “Teach me to do Thy will.” Who are these suppliant for the clearer light? Are they babes, simpletons, novices, ignoramuses, illiterate, inexperienced souls, with the least vision and enlightenment? Surely not. They are the seers, the poets, the princes of the intellectual world, the masters of those who know, and it is precisely such royal souls as Moses, Job, Isaiah, David, Solomon, John, and Paul who are most conscious of imperfect knowledge, and who seek most passionately for the fuller all-illustrating light. If we live thus in simplicity of desire, in meekness of spirit, in all lowliness and openness of mind, praying that we may be filled with the riches of understanding, our whole body shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give us light.

2. It may be done by *insincerity*. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” If we

have no other desire than to know and to do God's will, the whole field of life and duty will be illuminated, but any sympathy or aim which contradicts the glory of God injures our faculty of vision, and leads us into false ways. The love of money is a cause of blindness, creating strange refractions, distortions and eclipses. The young man said unto Jesus: "All these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?" Jesus said unto him: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow Me." The young man saw much, but he could not see this. Of all the dust thrown in men's eyes none is more blinding than gold dust. "So they took the money, and did as they were taught." The cotton fields of the Southern States were the gold fields of America, and therefore the Republic long failed to see the wrongfulness of slavery; the revenue of the opium traffic makes it impossible for England to realise the monstrosity of the destroying trade. And in private life covetousness works the same result, drawing a veil over the heart. The love of pleasure is a cause of blindness. Herod, it would seem, saw some great truths and felt the power of them, but when the Baptist said to him concerning Herodias: "It is not lawful for thee to have her," the king could not see that. Dazzled by forbidden things, we fail to see the beauty of that righteousness which comes

between us and the objects of our irregular desire. The love of popularity is a cause of blindness. The Pharisees saw many truths distinctly, but when He came who was the Truth, they saw no beauty that they should desire Him. And Christ gives the reason for their tragical oversight: "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" We do not see the truths which cross our inclination. If the eye can see whate'er it will, it cannot see whate'er it does not will. The grand condition of seeing clearly throughout the whole circle of thought and responsibility is to have a supreme regard to the will of God, having no disturbing personal delights, ambitions or aims. Sincerity, love of the sunlight, is the first condition of clear vision. The single eye sees clearly, and sees all.

3. It may be done by *disobedience*. To be faithless to the truth we apprehend is to put out, in some degree at least, the eyes of our understanding. The habitual denial by the will for the sake of interested and vicious motives destroys the insight of the soul, and leaves the disobedient to stumble in the darkness. Our passions coarsen our spiritual sensibilities; delicate nerves are atrophied, and transparent lenses rendered opaque by disuse; our utilitarian interests make us short-sighted; our worldly life through the years spoils the eye which beholds God and the things of His kingdom. The bright becomes in-

distinct, the great dwindles, the beautiful loses its magic. As Coventry Patmore says: "If we knew the secrets of the lives of those—alas! innumerable—who seem to have no real apprehension of anything, none of the light which it is said lighteth every man that cometh into the world, it would probably be found that they have not been born without, but have forfeited their noblest human heritage by repeated practical denials of the things which they have seen." Yes, even so: they were not born without the faculty of seeing the invisible things, but the eagle's eye has been quenched, being persistently turned toward things selfish, coarse and unclean. And what we wish to recall here is, that even partial disobedience means more or less of blindness. What we must do if our intuitions are to be preserved clear, our sensibilities delicate, our wisdom large, is to pay an equal regard to all the requirements of the law. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments." Here the Psalmist touches the essential point. We are partial within ourselves, picking and choosing as to what we shall do and leave undone, and defective apprehension and sympathy follow. Ready obedience to the law in all its exactions, ready obedience to grace in all its impulses, these are the conditions of universal insight and wisdom.

Then keep thy conscience sensitive,
No inward token miss,

And go where grace entices thee ;
Perfection lies in this.

To see clearly we must wish to see clearly. Amiel says : "The number of beings who wish to see truly is extraordinarily small." A startling affirmation, but one probably true. Men fail to see truly because they do not wish to see truly—it would cost too much, it would reveal a path they are not prepared to follow. Pride, insincerity, self-will, spoil our perspicuity, make us incapable of appreciating the truth in its manifoldness. There is forthwith a dark place in our heart, and our charity is chilled ; a dark place in our understanding, and our judgment is at fault ; a dark place in our conscience, and our conduct is wanting in consistency and blamelessness. Living in the spirit of humility, sincerity and obedience, we are sensitive to all the streaming light of Christ, our soul is filled with its translucence, and every step of our pathway is irradiated by the bright shining of the candle of the Lord.

Note finally,

III

The evil significance of this defective enlightenment.

1. *It destroys peace.*—The perfect peace which is the privilege of God's children is made impossible by these dark places. We sometimes say, "What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve," but that is not true here—ignorance, error, and the faults

which spring therefrom mean restlessness, discontent and sorrow. It is not only our positive obvious defects which breed misery, far more than we often think the hidden things of the heart determine the brightness or sadness of our experience. There is no greater joy than to walk in the truth, and every whit that we fall short of the truth implies that we fall equally short of full felicity. It is said that the spots upon the sun mean terrestrial confusion and disaster, and the dark places of the soul mean smitten and withered spaces in our thought and experience. We ask in perplexity : " Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me ? " but if we could trace many of our real yet vague experiences of wretchedness to their obscure origin, we should find that they take their rise in those places in our heart where the light does not shine.

2. It *maims character*.—Some little while ago we noticed a tree planted at the sunny end of a house, and there the blossoms were large and beautiful, it was a feast to the eyes ; but some of the branches were trained round the corner of the house, where they got so much less of the sun, and the difference was wonderful. The blossoms here were starved and sad, and there was the least promise of fruit ; there was the same root and the same stem, but whilst one part of the tree was in the full glorious light, the other branches were in the shade. Ah ! brethren, it is thus in character. The dark places mean unfruitful

branches—strange weaknesses, distortions, immaturities, indirections, failures in practical life and conduct. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” ; and if we are to bear all manner of precious fruit, and to bear each in its season, we must trustfully and joyfully lay open our whole soul to the full noon of God’s light shining in the face of Jesus Christ.

3. It *implies peril*.—Here, where our mind is confused, our conscience hesitating, our feeling morbid, our will inoperative, the great danger of life lies. There is in the human eye a spot where the optic nerve enters, and which is known as the blind spot ; cricketers talk a good deal about this visual imperfection, for sooner or later the bowler finds out the blind spot, the batsman misjudges the ball, and his sport comes to an end. The devil plays for the blind spot, and if there is such a defect in our spirit, sooner or later he brings us into trouble. The blind spot in the natural eye is a necessary unavoidable physiological defect of which the brightest and most skilful athlete cannot rid himself ; but morally and religiously no part of our nature need be dark, and we may successfully defend ourselves in every assault. If for any subtle self-serving we allow some bias of the mind, some prejudice which warps the judgment, some narrowness of charity, some inertia which obstructs conviction, some obliquity of aim, some deflection in action, we lay ourselves open to grievous

losses and sorrows ; but if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

It is our privilege to walk in the full light, to have our whole soul instructed and luminous. There is in nature a mollusc with eleven thousand eyes, and as the shell grows the eyes still multiply. Surely, men ought to be full of eyes, of inspirations, perceptions, sensibilities, so that they may realise truly and happily the vast bright universe of which they are the heirs. Let us be sure that whilst Christ promised to us the Spirit who should guide us into "the whole truth," we do not come short of the gracious promise. "Take heed, therefore."

"Take heed" to God's word. To see clearly we must test and strengthen our vision by revelation. "To the law and to the testimony : if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." How impossible it is to express the value of this standard and source of vision ! "What advantage then hath the Jew? . . . Much every way : chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." With diseased organs of sight, perplexed by dark and dancing shadows, it is a peculiarly precious thing to have this master light of all our seeing. By the aid of that most perfect scientific instrument, the ophthalmoscope, with its condensing mirror and myriad of little lenses, the

oculist, in looking into a person's eye, sees spread before him a record of the action of many of the more important organs of the human economy. Not only is he by this means able to determine approximately the necessary strength of glass required to give perfect vision, but the existence of tumours pressing on the brain tissue, the condition of the general nervous system, the presence of disease in various organs, and the richness of the blood current are clearly traced on the sensitive plate of nature's camera. What the ophthalmoscope is to the oculist, enabling him to perceive the defects of the eye, and obscure defects of the system that the eye may indicate, revelation is to our higher nature, a test and criticism of supreme value. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." If we wish to see clearly we must test and purge our vision thus. Here is the radical cure for cataract and colour-blindness. To see truly we must see light in God's light. After the dust and fog and mirage of a day in the city, it is a wonderful restorative to cleanse the eyes with the euphrasy of the Bible.

"Take heed" to your spirit and life. To see truly we must keep our soul in health. Our general health often determines our vision. If with our bodily eyes we are to see at our best, we must

decline narcotics, abstain from intemperance, live in purity, maintain our strength and vigour. Seeing clearly is not a matter that stands apart from our general health, but it is the sign and consequence of bodily perfection. It is thus, too, with our superior nature. We must keep the soul in health if we are to see things as God sees them. The lustre of the eye is dependent upon the purity of the heart ; true seeing is the reward of true living.

Very precious indeed is the delicate sense of the scientist by which he apprehends the manifold action of sovereign law in the forms and movements of the physical sphere ; most delightful and wonderful is the fine insight of the sculptor, painter, and musician into the significance of form, colour, and sound ; more divine still is the vision of the poet beholding the light that never was on sea or shore : but most precious and blessed of all is that spiritual faculty by which we see the realities of the eternal world, that moral sense by which we discern the beauty and obligation of the law of righteousness, that moral sympathy which puts us into fellowship with the living God. " And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may approve things that are excellent ; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

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“In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, *even* a blessing in the midst of the land : whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed *be* Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance.”—*Isaiah* xix. 23-25.

II

THE HOLY TRIPLE ALLIANCE

WHATEVER may have been the immediate and exact application of this passage we need not stay to inquire, its grand teaching being sufficiently clear. The Egyptians were to the South, the Assyrians to the East, and Israel came between the two mighty peoples. For generations Egypt and Assyria were at deadly enmity, and it was a great disadvantage to Israel to find itself placed between these clashing empires. A buffer state may be useful, but it occupies a by no means pleasant situation. The text indicates, however, that a deep change is to come to pass. "The Egyptian shall serve with the Assyrian." That is, both of them shall serve Jehovah. The two mighty powers which have hitherto met only as foes are to meet in the worship of Jehovah. And in consequence of this, there is to be fellowship between them. Friendly intercourse is established, because both nations are converted to Jehovah. And the fact must not be overlooked that this international friendship is brought about by the

little central state. The road of communication runs through Canaan. Israel has reached the grand end of its calling ; it becomes a blessing to the whole circuit of the earth. Of course, we see at a glance that this passage looks far beyond any immediate local realisation ; it is a noble prophecy, destined to find its full accomplishment in the latter days. In "that day," in the Messianic age, shall the ultimate fulfilment of this prediction be.

Let us seek to bring home to ourselves some of the teaching of this remarkable passage.

I

I observe, first, then, *that it is God's purpose to perfect the race through international intercourse and friendship.* The text represents the ideal condition of things. It is not the purpose of God that the nations should exist as so many hostile groups ; hitherto this has been largely the case, but chronic national antagonism is not heaven's design. Neither is it the design of God respecting the various peoples that they should dwell in a state of isolation. It is manifestly the Divine purpose that the several nations shall complete each other through sympathy and reciprocity. Just as God binds the orbs of the sky into magnificent musical systems, in which each star still preserves its own orbit and movement and colour, so does He, by many subtle chords, link

together the scattered nations into harmonious constellations, into one vast and blessed brotherhood, each people still retaining the distinctive characteristics which are so precious to itself and to the race. Geography indicates this. The good things of nature are not all found in any one land ; they are distributed over the planet ; reciprocity is designed and necessitated by the very dispositions of soil and climate. We must voyage to China for tea, to Australia for wool, to America for cotton and wheat, to Africa for gold and diamonds, to the North for oil, to the South for silks and spices, and so on endlessly. Just as in nature the various flowers have their several nectars and perfumes to attract the bees and secure that cross-fertilisation which is essential to strength and fruitfulness, so God has given each land some special treasure that it may attract to itself different peoples, and secure that national intercourse which is essential to the fullest and highest civilisation. Ethnology also gives a reason for national sympathy and intercourse. No one national type includes all perfections. The mental and physical deficiencies of mankind show just as clearly as geography does that the nations need one another. The intellectual brilliancy of the French ; the patience and thoroughness of the German ; American audacity ; the artistic instinct of the Italian ; the practical genius of the Anglo-Saxon ; the science of the West ; the idealism of

the East ; these show the real inter-dependence of the several races, and how necessary international intercourse is if mankind is to realise the fulness of power and happiness. It is an old saying that "no one man is a whole man,"—that is, in each individual something is lacking which makes society necessary to us, and we may justly say that no one nation is a whole nation ; it has limitations and deficiencies which other nations must supply. History also shows us the solidarity of the race, and how wonderfully any one people is enriched by the contributions of the rest. Take our own nation. In our gardens are the flowers and fruits of all climates ; hardly one flower or fruit is indigenous to our island—the pear, the peach, the apricot, came from Asia ; the jessamine from the East Indies ; the lily and tulip from the Levant ; the tube rose from Java ; the carnation and pink from Italy ; the dahlia from the tableland of Mexico ; the heliotrope from Peru ; the fuchsia from Chili ; annuals from California ; shrubs from Japan ; blooms from Siberia ; flowers from the "bush" of the Cape of Good Hope ; from the forests of Brazil ; and from the "scrub" of Australia. And this is only a parable of the fact that in a thousand ways our neighbours have contributed to make us what we are. The Italians and French taught us silk-weaving. The Flemings brought us our fine woollen trade. The Venetians showed us how to make glass. A German erected our first paper-mill.

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A Dutchman began our potteries. The Genoese taught us to build ships. And so history reveals that through successive generations the several nations have enriched each other in art, industry, literature, jurisprudence, language, philosophy, government, and religion.

The thought of God is the brotherhood of man, and all things prove it. The nations are not self-sufficing and designed to dwell apart. China is an object-lesson as to the evil of national isolation. The nations are not doomed to perpetual hostility; they are not to grow by destroying one another. In the past nations have seemed to be enriched chiefly by the destruction of their neighbours. The conquering races have expanded their territory by partitioning the territory of the subjugated people. It has been the same in art. The ruin of Greece became the enrichment of the other nations in art and literature. The same thing was repeated some four hundred years ago in Italy. Italy was a vast storehouse of artistic treasure, and it was only when that storehouse was broken up and its riches plundered, that the North of Europe regained and developed its intellectual life. And it has been the same with religion, as we see in the history of the Jews. The "fall of them" was "the riches of the world," and "the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles." But this is not God's normal way of making one people serve another. We must not misread this

into history. By strengthening one another are they all to be perfected. Paul saw this. "If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" We must get rid of the horrible idea that we can rise only by our neighbours' depreciation. We are infinitely more enriched by their prosperity than by their fall.

II

The Gospel of Christ is the supreme unifying power of the race. In the fulness of its meaning this is what our text signifies. Egypt and Assyria are reconciled at one altar—the altar of the living God, ministered by Israel. The lesson here for us is that the marriage of nations will take place where other marriages are celebrated, at the altar of God. In other words, the unifying power of the race is the highest religious faith—the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some suppose that the ameliorative, reconciling influence will be found in commerce. They see in the white sails of the ship the wings of the dove with the olive branch. That commerce ought to foster the sentiment of unity is clear enough, that such is its natural tendency we fully believe; but there are malign influences which defeat the benign action of trade. Adam Smith says: "Commerce, which ought naturally to be among nations as among

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individuals, a bond of union and friendship, has become the most fertile source of discord and animosity." Seeley's book on "The Expansion of England" shows this fact very strikingly, and heart-burnings among nations are still due to this very thing. "Made in Germany" explains much of the bitter feeling which prevails to-day between two of the foremost civilisations of the world. Others think that the principle of unity will be found in the cultivation of cosmopolitan literature. Say they, Racine, Molière, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Goethe, Calderon, are brothers, and the study of their inspired works will make us brothers the wide world over, lifting us above the rivalries, the enmities, the antipathies, of climates, times, and places. Recognising the immortal work of humanity in literature and art, we shall come sooner or later to the recognition of our unity. Now, there can be no doubt that the tendency here is in the right direction. The influence of great literature is pacifying, but it must also be remembered that such literature feeds the patriotism which is a peril. Many to-day build great hopes on science. Science reveals the unity of nature; the spectroscope demonstrates the identity of the material of the stars; the law of gravitation prevails through the universe, and it is the boast of science that it establishes ever more clearly the fundamental oneness and order of the cosmos. Now, many think that a feeling of this unity will take possession of the

nations as they become more enlightened, and thus international concord and peace will gradually be established. Let us hope that science has some such tendency ; but science teaches another doctrine, viz., that all nature is full of strife, and that civilisation itself is built on antagonism. We are slow to believe that the spectacle of nature's oneness and harmony will ever subdue those false passions of humanity out of which arise national hatreds and strifes. It is a great mistake to imagine that the alienations of generations arise out of intellectual misconceptions, and that they will be rendered impossible through literature, science, and commerce. "From whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not even of your lusts which war in your members?" They come out of the greed of gold, the passion for rule, the pride of territory, the lust of power, and these passions are at the root of the jealousy and hatred of races. It is only as a great faith changes the spirit of man that discords resolve themselves into harmonies. Some one said to Coleridge that the tendency of something or other was in the right direction. "Yes," said the philosopher, "and the tendency of that thistledown is towards China, but it will never get there." The tendency of commerce, of science, and of literature is towards universal harmony, but they will never go all the way. These ameliorative laws and forces are efficient only whilst they are energised by the sanctions and inspirations

of a great religious faith which touches and purifies the deep places of the human heart.

“God . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the bounds of their habitation.” Here is the grand central truth, and just as this truth is realized in Jesus will the great reconciliation be brought to pass. Christ reveals the universal Father, “the God and Father of us all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” He is Himself not a Jew, a Greek, a Roman, or a Saxon, but the Son of Man, the ideal man, the pattern for the race. He is the one Saviour of the world. His Church is the New Jerusalem from above, the mother of us all. And He has gone to prepare an inheritance for men of all nations and languages, and peoples and tongues. Christ is the great Reconciler. He reconciles the alienated heaven and earth; He reconciles our personal warring nature, and gives us peace; He reconciles the jealous nations, and causes them to beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Isaiah is fascinated with the idea expressed in our text. The prophet has a wide horizon. He feels that all nations are to be brought into unity, and that it will be effected by a spiritual faith. Paul cherishes the same great hope. He is carried away by the splendid vision. The unity that is demonstrated in science, developed by commerce, fostered by literature, is to be realized in the love of God.

Though sundered far, by faith we meet
Around one common mercy-seat.

“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth ; even in Him.”

In the Epistles of St. Paul we have an affecting instance which shows how soon the harmonising sentiment of Christianity began to assert itself. In his second Epistle to the Corinthian Church Paul urges the Corinthians to send help to their Christian brethren at Jerusalem who were suffering from a famine. Now, those Greeks of Europe and Jews of Asia differed in many ways. They lived on different continents, belonged to different races, and spoke different languages. They had never seen each other, never heard of each other, till Paul came to Corinth. But the Gospel had bound them together by a common sympathy. The Corinthians learned that in the far-off land were men of a Syrian race who had been brought to God, who loved Christ, who hoped for heaven, and the hearts of the Corinthians warmed to these brethren, and they resolved to make a collection on behalf of those who were no longer strangers and foreigners. Paul rejoiced in this sign of the brotherhood of distant nations, and in the power of the Christian sentiment to make that brotherhood a glorious fact. He saw in the charity of the Church in Corinth toward the

Church in Jerusalem a prophecy of the time when mutual natural hatred will be effaced, and all nations be knit into friendship and goodwill by a common faith in the common Lord. And that reconciling sentiment has been working ever since, until 1800 years later we in Europe have just made another collection for another famine in Asia, sending an amount that would have astonished the Apostle, despatching it over a far wider sea, to a people of another continent, race and language. It is this common faith in one God, one Saviour, one home, working in all nations, that must gradually bring in the reign of goodwill and peace. What commerce, science, and literature fail to effect, faith and love and hope in Christ will bring to pass, "For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

III

I observe finally, *That God has in a very special measure committed unto us the unifying Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.* We see in the text how Israel is planted between the great world-empires, and that it is her glorious calling to bring these empires to the worship of the true God. Now, it is not too much to say that to a large extent England in this age occupies the position that Israel occupied

of old, and that it is our special calling to bring all nations to the obedience of the faith. The sovereign purpose of God was seen in the election of the Jew, the Greek, and the Roman ; they were the chosen instruments to bring about the Divine purposes : we must believe that the same sovereignty prevails in the government of the world to-day, and we may confidently affirm that it is the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon to evangelize the world, or, as John Milton said, "To teach the nations how to live."

It is sometimes a matter of derision that a small island like ours should cherish such large ambitions, but we know that it is of old God's way to choose the weak and the small to confound the things that are vast and mighty. Look at the small extent geographically of the theatre of revelation, Palestine. Of all historic lands the smallest ; the length can in no proper way of reckoning be held to exceed one hundred and twenty miles ; its breadth may be set down as averaging less than thirty. Now, the scoffer has often derided the geographical insignificance of the Holy Land. Michelet, for instance, does so. He says : "I appreciate Nazareth and the small lakes of Galilee ; but, to speak frankly, I am thirsty ; I could drink them off at a draught." But in his next chapter the philosopher comes to discuss Greece, and, forgetting his mockery of little Palestine, he speaks thus rapturously of the geographical insignificance of Greece : "Greece, so small, has done

more than all the empires. She is the instructress of peoples." Why did he not drink Greece off at a draught? The lakes of Galilee would go as far as the rivers of Greece. The fact is, when he wrote of Greece he had no prejudice, and was prepared to see that an amazing disproportion may exist between the importance of history and the smallness of the theatre on which that history is transacted. God influences vast spheres from small points ; the touch is insignificant, compared with the mass affected. When God wishes to move wide areas and long ages, He comes into contact with one nation only, one city only, one family only, one individual only. When an engineer desires to accomplish his most splendid effects, he does not thrust his back against a gable, he presses his finger on a button. The question is, not the surface touched, but the power that is released.

Now, I say that England stands much in the same position that Israel did—it is the spiritual centre of the world. As Palestine came between Egypt and Assyria, so this island comes in a wonderful manner between the Old World and the New. God gave spiritual gifts in a remarkable degree to Israel—the revelation of Himself, the knowledge of His law, the sense of eternity ; and God has given us richly the treasures of His Gospel. God in His government has also given to us special powers for the diffusion of the Gospel. Our language, our literature, our

institutions, our spirit of adventure, our gift of colonisation, our striving and capacity for universality fit us for the task. We are a people gifted of God, and prepared of God for carrying out in an eminent degree His Gospel of universal salvation and blessing. The grand prophetic thought of our text is destined to be fulfilled in all its amplitude and splendour by this insignificant murky island in the Northern Sea.

1. Let us lay to heart the truth that the high mission of our country is that it be made a spiritual blessing to the world. Other lands have not come under our influence that we may cripple them, not that we may exploit them, but that we may serve them. "He that will be greatest must be servant of all," is a truth for a nation as well as for an individual. God has preserved to us a spiritual faith. We have not fallen under the influence of scepticism as France has done, of Catholicism and rationalism as other countries on the Continent have done ; we have an open Bible, an Evangelical creed, an enthusiasm of faith. And we are to bless with spiritual blessings throughout the wide sphere of our imperial influence. Cynics may scoff at our assumptions and aspirations, but we must prove by our character, our services, and our sacrifices the loftiness and genuineness of our convictions.

2. We shall succeed in our great Evangelical task if we are faithful. "In that day shall Israel be the

third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land : whom the Lord of Hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance." What an extraordinary promise ! What a glorious outlook ! That the idol shrines shall be forsaken and that Jehovah will alone be exalted ! The ibis-headed and ram-headed deities, sacred goat, and cat, and crocodile, moon-gods and sun-gods of Egypt, all were to go ; the eagle-headed gods of Assyria, the winged bulls and lions ; fish-gods and fly-gods of Phœnicia ; all the rabble of the pantheon were to perish, and all the violence and sensuality which pertained to them, and only God was to be exalted in that day, and to be glorious in holiness. So, dear brethren, the day will come when every system of idolatry, every superstition, every institution of shame and misery will be overthrown, and God will say, " Blessed be India My people, and China the work of My hands, and Europe Mine inheritance." We shall be a blessing in the circle of the earth. It will come.

No one who has seen the lovely Bay of Naples, can ever forget the magnificent stretch of waters, the twenty or thirty miles of memorable coast that girdle it, the vast city with its painted palaces, its domes and spires, Vesuvius with nodding plume of fire and vapour, and over all the sky blue as Aaron's mantle. Now, geologists declare that that lovely bay is really

the crater of an extinct volcano. In primitive ages it was a vast and awful abyss of flame and fury, but the fires died down, the lava ceased to flow, the smoke rolled away, the glorious sea overflowed the crater, and now the lovely waters sleep and dream, reflecting the lights and colours of the sky. This world for ages has been a veritable mouth of hell, but as the years roll its fires slacken, its wrath abates, its darkness is less dense, its desolations and miseries come to an end, and truth and justice, mercy and kindness, are covering it as the great deep profound. "And there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars, no slave ship, no pirate ship, no man-of-war shall pass thereby ; for the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our King ; He will save us."

COMPARATIVE SERVICE

“Nevertheless they shall be his servants ; that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.”—*2 Chron.* xii. 8.

III

COMPARATIVE SERVICE

IT is an old failing of human nature not to know when it is well off, and the text furnishes an illustration of that failing. During the first years of his reign Rehoboam was faithful to the God of Israel, and the country prospered ; then Rehoboam forsook God, and Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem. At the preaching of the prophet Shemaiah, Rehoboam humbled himself ; and in consequence of his penitence God promised that Shishak should not utterly overthrow Judah, yet the people must smart for their sins. " Nevertheless they shall be his servants." They have been impatient of My service, discontented with Me, disobedient to My rule ; therefore they shall be subject to the Egyptian, that they may know by bitter experience how much milder is My yoke than that of the kingdoms of the countries. There is a great lesson here for to-day. Adam was discontented with paradise, Israel with Canaan, and many now are despising the goodly inheritance we have in Christ. We are fond of com-

paring the service of God with alternative services, to the disparagement of the former. We are tired of the gentlest Master ; we revolt from the noblest service ; we are repining, captious, backsliding. Let us then compare the service of our Lord with the service of other lords who claim dominion over us.

I

Compare *the faith of Christ with the faith of scepticism*. I say the faith of scepticism, for the sceptic has a creed just as truly as the Christian believer has. Many are greatly dissatisfied with the Christian revelation ; they are anxious to set it aside, to find substitutes for it. The proverb says : "The cow in the meadow, knee-deep in clover, often looks over the hedge and longs for the common." Many are now looking over the hedge of revelation, and longing for the bare wastes and the wild growths of infidelity. We feed among the lilies, we drink living water, we hear the voice of the good Shepherd ; but it is not enough. We do not know what is the matter with us, and dream that if we were rid of revelation we should enjoy a larger liberty, walk in a clearer light, realize more complete intellectual and spiritual satisfactions.

Would this be the case ?

If we renounce revelation shall we be better off *intellectually* ? It must be remembered that if revela-

tion is rejected, all the dark problems of nature, all the perplexing enigmas of human life, will still be left. Revelation has not created the confusions, the cruelties, the calamities of the world ; and if revelation were discarded, the darkness, suffering, and sadness of life would remain. You will not make a black sky blue by smashing the weather-glass ; you will not turn cruel winter into glorious summer by throwing out the thermometer ; neither will you get rid of sorrow and mystery and death by rejecting the Bible. Can you, having rejected revelation, give that dark world any clearer or happier interpretation ? Surely the interpretations of ourselves and our environment given by pessimism, agnosticism, and atheism are infinitely less satisfactory than the solutions of revelation. The obscurities, the contradictions, the despairs of philosophic doubt are far worse to bear than the mysteries of the Christian faith.

If we renounce revelation shall we be better off as pertaining to the *conscience* ? Take away the Bible, and conscience is left—an accusing conscience. To what terrible beliefs and deeds an accusing conscience drives men the history of paganism clearly shows. A guilty conscience built the wicker-basket of Druidism ; it doomed children to pass through the fire to Moloch ; it raised bloody altars in Phœnician and Aztec shrines ; it crushed the Hindu under the wheels of Juggernaut ; and in savage lands

from time immemorial this sense of sin has prevailed, exacting the most horrible sufferings and immolations. "Yes," you reply ; "but it is impossible for these tragedies of superstition to be repeated ; Druidism, for instance, can never come back again." Who can say what may, or may not, come back again ? At this moment we are receiving an object-lesson on this very question. Theosophy teaches that through endless reincarnations we must be purged from our sins. Our sorrows in this life are the results of the sins and errors of past incarnations, and before us is a dreary vista of fresh incarnations in which we are again to sin and suffer. Paganism taught no more awful doctrine than that of the transmigration of souls, and yet this doctrine of theosophy is being enthusiastically preached in our streets to-day. If this thing is done in a green tree, what will be done in a dry ? It is terrible to think of the monstrous intellectual and religious systems which must arise when men no longer know the mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. The guilty conscience will not go to sleep ; it will have blood and tears.

If we renounce revelation shall we be better off touching *character* ? If unbelief triumphed, and Christ were rejected as the pattern and perfecter of character, would anything be gained ? The whole world of thoughtful men acknowledge the marvellous, the incomparable moral beauty of Jesus Christ. No one poet excels all other poets, no one artist

excels all other artists, no one philosopher excels all other philosophers, as Jesus Christ excels all other moralists. If any ruffianly iconoclast were to shatter the Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican, or the Venus de' Medici in Florence, the whole world of taste would grieve over an irreparable artistic loss ; but if we destroy the image of Christ, who shall replace Him? All Christendom would be infinitely the poorer, whoever might be unfortunate enough to become His substitute. It is impossible to conceive the magnitude of such a disaster ; the sovereign ideal would be lost, and all character suffer untold impoverishment and eclipse. Yet with peculiar wantonness our countrymen are craving for alien faiths. They have set up a Moslem mosque in Liverpool ; they are advocating the claims of Zoroaster ; they have established schools of Buddhism in Paris and London. These malcontents are very numerous, and their freaks amount to a mania.

Let us cordially accept the noble doctrines of the Scriptures. We know no more reasonable interpretation of the universe than that given by Isaiah and Paul. To the pathetic cry of the guilty soul, "What must I do to be saved?" we have no answer that will compare with the response, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And when we search for a pattern and inspirer of character, One strangely fair stands out from all others, above all others. "We beheld His glory, the glory

as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Let us in these days of restlessness and vagrant fancy listen to the great Master: "Verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Trampling down the hedge of revelation, we shall find ourselves on the common—bare pastures, bitter fruits, cruel thorns, wild beasts. Shishak took away the shields of gold from Jerusalem, and poor Rehoboam put in their place shields of brass; and, if we permit the fraud, infidelity will despoil us of the armour of light, leaving us to fight the bitter battles of life and death with far inferior convictions and hopes. Let us prize the light, the power, the promise of Christian truth. "If God had had a better gospel, He would have given it us." "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

II

Compare *the doctrine of Christ with the doctrine of the world*. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Thus to-day many are inclined to prefer the worldly life to the Christian life. It seems so much more free; it has so much more colour in it; it promises so much more profit and pleasure. Men feel that the Christian law retards

their youth, cramps and foils their appetites and curiosities, withstands and baffles their cravings. But is this so? "The doctrine of Jesus is hard, men say. But how much harder," exclaims Tolstoi, "is the doctrine of the world! In my own life I can reckon up as much suffering caused by following the doctrine of the world as many a martyr has endured for the doctrine of Jesus. All the most painful moments of my life, all these are only so much martyrdom exacted by fidelity to the doctrine of the world." How much harder, indeed!

Take its doctrine of glory. Cruel doctrine! What blood, groans, tears, it implies! And not only on the battlefield is the doctrine of glory seen to be merciless; it works woe in a thousand subtle ways in all spheres of human life and action.

Take its doctrine of gain. How that principle of selfishness, which is the doctrine of the world, grinds men to powder! In social life, in commercial life, in personal life, infinite suffering is wrought by insatiable greed.

Take its doctrine of fashion. What a terrible price the world exacts for its empty shows, its vain titles, its purple and gold! How tyrannical and mocking is the life of pride and vanity! How unutterably weary are thousands of walking in a vain show!

Take its doctrine of pleasure. Millions have been ruined by following its paths of roses and music

and beauty. How cruel is the world's doctrine of pleasure, seeing it is the doctrine of passion, lust and egotism! The world's garden is a Golgotha; its flowers grow amongst skulls.

These are the doctrines of the world, of the sphere outside God's love and service. Some may live the worldly life after a gross fashion, and others live the same life on far higher lines of intellect and refinement; but the life without God is substantially the same everywhere and in whatever direction it may be developed, and however subtly it may be disguised, it works out heart-sickness and infinite sorrow.

Yes, as Tolstoï says: "No doctrine is harder than the doctrine of the world. Thirty millions of men have perished in wars fought on behalf of the doctrine of the world; thousands of millions of beings have perished, crushed by a social system organised on the principle of the doctrine of the world. .

You will find, perhaps to your surprise, that nine-tenths of all human suffering endured by men is useless, and ought not to exist—that, in fact, the majority of men are martyrs to the doctrine of the world." Ah! the world has far more martyrs than the Church has. Its crowns of roses are sharper than crowns of thorns; its scarlet frets more than sheepskins and goatskins; and they who dance to its music weep as they dance. Fox's "Book of Martyrs" is not a large book, but if ever the devil's

book of martyrs should be written, what library would contain it ! The world is crowded with grid-irons, racks, stakes and crosses. The majority of men are martyrs, inglorious martyrs, martyrs by the pang without the palm.

What is the doctrine of Jesus that men call hard ? Instead of the doctrine of glory, He teaches the doctrine of humility and service ; for the doctrine of gain, the doctrine of equity and love ; for the doctrine of fashion, the doctrine of simplicity and truth ; for the doctrine of pleasure, the doctrine of purity and peace. Well may Jesus dare to say, " My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." How mild are His requirements ! Most delightful are the doctrines of justice, love, purity, lowliness, mercy. Life in Christ is free, blessed, bright ; it brings peace ; it will bear thinking about ; it leaves no sting ; it is the life of the skylark singing in the blue ; it unfolds like a flower ; it blossoms and fruits as the trees do ; it moves with more than the fabled music of the stars. Here men enter into the rest that they have sought from the foundation of the world. When the nations once try the doctrine of Jesus, what a globe of glory will this planet be ! When the individual once really tries the doctrine of Jesus, his heart is like a watered garden. " Lord, to whom shall we go, but unto Thee ? Thou hast the words of eternal life "

III

Compare *the law of Christ with the service of self-will*. A man says : " I will not be restrained ; I will determine my own path, choose my own pleasures, shape my own character, be the architect of my own fortune. It shall throughout be according to my own preferences and determinations." Is, then, the self-willed man happy ?

Is he happy as he sets himself against nature ? You tell your boy not to play with fire ; but he is self-willed, and takes the opportunity to sport with matches and gunpowder, and probably repents ever after. You tell him not to eat those crab-apples ; yet no sooner is your back turned than they are devoured, and his agony persuades him of the inexpediency of so doing. When we grow older our self-will reappears in another form—we carry out the old spirit of self-assertion and revolt in new directions, and consumption, gout, rheumatism, dyspepsia stop the riot. It does not pay to set up our will against the grand ordinances of nature. We get the worst of that conflict most dismally. As the Oriental proverb says : " When the egg fights with the rock, the yolk comes out."

Is the self-willed man happy as he opposes himself to the laws and institutions of society ? He who resolves to set the community at defiance, and consult only his own arbitrary, selfish indulgence, his ego-

tistical inclinations and interests, is not to be envied. To outrage the judgments, the feelings, the rights of society is to be keenly miserable. The selfish will coming into conflict with social law means that the selfish will punishes itself.

Is the self-willed man happy within himself? You say proudly: "I am my own master." Could you have a worse? Could there be a more exacting master than your selfishness, a more bitter master than your pride, a more cruel master than your lusts, a more devilish master than your temper? Can there be under the sun a more complete and miserable despotism than that of a weak, blind, greedy, passionate nature?

It is a terrible thing to set up our will against the divine will as that will is expressed in the physical universe, in society, or as it seeks to fulfil itself in our personal nature and life. Self-will is captivity and ruin; loving obedience to the will of God in Christ, with its self-control and self-denial, is health and peace. The tree in the wilderness is free; it grows at its own wild will. And what does it bear? Bitter sloes, crabs, poison berries. What is it worth? Nothing. But the tree in a garden is planted by a high, rough wall; its liberty is restricted at a hundred points; it is nailed into the solid masonry; each season the husbandman comes with a sharp knife and bleeds it: yet it is now one of the glories of the vegetable world, bearing fruits large and

mellow. Do you say, "I will not be walled round"? Do not spurn restraint. It is a good thing to be walled up in a garden of spices; they are worst off who are outside. The infinite love of God is expressed in the laws of Christ. His commandments are not grievous; His service is perfect liberty. To be His slaves is to be kings. Surrender yourself to Him, and prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

"The service of the kingdoms of the countries." The Jews often heard delightful things about this foreign service. They remembered the fish which they did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic. Nothing to do in Egypt but to regale themselves with piquant viands, and to stroll under the palms on the banks of the Nile. They heard of the attractions of Babylon, of its hanging gardens, its luxuries and delights. And the ambassadors of Sennacherib painted for them in glowing colours the life of Assyria: "A land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards." No more work, no more worry, no more worship. Getting away from Jerusalem, they were to get away from temple and law, from priest and prophet, and to taste the pleasures of an unfettered life. But did they find captivity so desirable? The fig tree turned out a willow on which they hung their harp; their task was intolerable; they smarted under the lash; their drink was gall; they could

not sing in a strange land ; they wept when they remembered Zion. It is thus to-day with men who listen to the voice of temptation, and turn away from life in Christ to the life of unbelief, of worldliness, and of self-will. The world promises much, promises only to mock and destroy.

You who are tempted to despise God's word, beware.

In an Eastern story we read of a traveller who arrived in a country where the children played at marbles with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and other precious gems. "These are doubtless the sons of some powerful king," said the traveller, as he bowed respectfully before them. The children, laughing, made him soon perceive that they were the street boys, and that the gems were only the pebbles of that country. Which things are an allegory. The purest gems of truth are the commonplaces of our age and country. Our babes hear from mothers' lips diviner words than Plato knew. The street boys are familiar with magnificent truths that prophets guessed but dimly. The trite teachings in rustic congregations are so mysterious and splendid that angels let down their wings to listen. And because the knowledge of these highest truths is so familiar to us, because the rubies and emeralds and diamonds of the gospel are the pebbles of this wealthy land, therefore we are tempted to despise them, to be blind to their beauty, to make playthings of them, and to fling them away.

God forbid that we should prove recreant to our privilege ! We know many wonderful things in science, but the best knowledge of our age is the knowledge of the way of peace in the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. It is here that we know more than the ancients. Let us count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Young men, weary of the order and restraint of a godly home, and ever hankering after a looser life, be wise, and stay thankfully where you are. Happily you know but little of the service of the kingdoms of the countries ; and here it is folly to be wise. You have never proved the treachery, the cruelty, the shame, the despair of the world ; and God forbid that you ever should. Know when you are well off. "Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass ? or loweth the ox over his fodder ?"

Discontented Englishmen, ever protesting against narrowness and austerity ; against Protestantism, Puritanism and bumbledom ; and who are ever looking with longing eyes to laxer civilisations : be content, subdue your murmurings and wantonness, lest God spoil your rich inheritance.

Discontented Christian, ever casting lingering glances at the life you have left, be content ; see to it that there is in you no evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Let us know our glorious privilege and be loyal to it, lest it be said

to us, as it was threatened to Israel : “ Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things ; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things : and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.”

**SANCTIFICATION : ENTIRE AND
UNIVERSAL**

“ This is the law of the house ; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house ”—*Ezekiel* xliii. 12.

IV

SANCTIFICATION: ENTIRE AND UNIVERSAL

EZEKIEL'S mission was to enforce a more intense idea of holiness: this is the burden of his prophecy, and the very essence of his mission is expressed in our text. Two things in this passage call for careful attention.

I

The exalted standard.—"This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round shall be *most holy*." Separation is the root idea of holiness, and the separation between the holy and the profane is sharper and more emphatic in the ideal temple of Ezekiel than in the temple of Solomon. Everything about the sacred house of vision was to be "most holy," to be entirely cut off from the profane, to be at the utmost remove from whatever could defile. The chief design

of the elaborate system of ritual law laid down in the closing chapters of this prophecy was to guard against the intrusion of anything unclean into the sphere of Jehovah's worship. Of course this legal system directly contemplated a ceremonial purity, but the deeper signification of the ideal architecture and the ritual law is clear enough to us. Christ came to fulfil to the uttermost these foreshadowings of ultimate holiness. He has given to the race the most exalted standard of life, and He will not rest until He has brought many sons to the glory of that righteousness of which He is the supreme Example.

First, Christ demands the highest holiness of *spirit*. He requires that His people shall be "most holy" in thought, feeling, sympathy, disposition, will and purpose. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Here is the deep full meaning of Ezekiel's ideal temple—the entire sanctification of the spirit of all the worshippers who form the church of the living God. Christ aims first of all to hallow the hidden man of the heart, to renew the personality in its very essence, to fill us with the thought and love of the holy God, to beget within us the genius of sanctity, to give us a clean heart and a right spirit.

Now the Christian faith is often criticised on this very ground; it is a standing objection that the

pulpit so fervently inculcates spiritual holiness when the thing that is wanted is practical holiness. Preachers are continually rebuked for expatiating upon the spiritual life when they might to so much greater advantage be exhorting their congregations to live honestly, truthfully and decently ; the pulpit is mystical, introspective and contemplative, when it should be concrete and practical. Such criticism is, however, deeply at fault. Mr. Walter Pater has a passage in which in a very remarkable way philosophy gives its sanction to the spiritual preacher "That the end of life is not action but contemplation—*being* as distinct from *doing*—a certain disposition of the mind : is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality. In poetry, in art, if you enter into their true spirit at all, you touch this principle, in a measure. These, by their very sterility, are a type of beholding for the mere joy of beholding. To treat life in the spirit of art is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified ; to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry. Wordsworth, and other poets who have been like him in ancient or more recent times, are the masters, the experts, in this art of impassioned contemplation. Their work is, not to teach lessons, or enforce rules, or even to stimulate us to noble ends ; but to withdraw the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great

facts in man's existence which no machinery affects." ¹ Such, in the higher, fuller measure which pertains to the realm of personal morality, are the philosophy and programme of the Christian faith. Christ taught that, "*being* as distinct from *doing*, a certain disposition of the mind," is the principle of the highest righteousness; and He sought first of all to restore men to pure being, to impart the true disposition, to fix our mind in impassioned contemplation on the eternal facts in our existence. He does not begin with rubrics and rules, but by making men to know truth in the inward parts. So does He cleanse the very thoughts of our heart that we may perfectly love Him and worthily magnify His holy name.

Dr. R. W. Dale expressed himself as disappointed with the ethical results of the Evangelical Revival of the last century, but we must remember that the evangelical movement was an appeal to being as distinct from doing, and that therein it followed the programme of Christ and made possible the fuller treatment of morals which marks our day. And let this be an apology for Pentecostal Leagues and Keswick Conventions. It is urged against these specific gatherings that their doctrines are too abstruse and mystical, that they fail to enforce the natural virtues and the duties of daily life; but, really, the promoters of these con-

¹ *Appreciations*, p. 61.

ventions seek through the deepening of spiritual life and the thorough hallowing of being to make rare doing possible. What our superficial poetry most needs to-day is to go back to the inwardness of Wordsworth; the remedy for our mediocre art is in impassioned contemplation and the brooding of the soul over the glories of the world; and there is no way to a higher righteousness in conduct and practical life except through that purity of heart which was the first demand of Jesus Christ.

Second, Christ demands the highest holiness in *character and action*. It is the merest perversity to allege that the Christian faith neglects the claims of practical righteousness. Christ's people are to be "most holy" in all manner of conversation. They are to carry out noble being into every relationship of life, into every obligation of society. The soul uplifted and palpitating with holy faith and emotion must vindicate itself in noble processes of action. And in fact it is conspicuously and abundantly demonstrated that the grace and love of Christ have touched all practical righteousness to finer issues.

It is an old objection, that in the nature of the case there can be no advance in morals; all that is open to the moralist is simply to keep on repeating the ten commandments. But in three directions morals are susceptible of growth:—the moral sense may become more acute, the energy which translates moral perception into action may

become more intense, and the highest ethical principles may be applied to an ever-enlarging range of individual and social life. Now ever since Christ came a wonderful revival has been witnessed in the realm of morals. Let any one carefully observe the place of practical righteousness, the manifold unfoldings of virtue, the sudden and delightful efflorescence of graces and perfections of character revealed in the various epistles of the New Testament, and he must be conscious that a new and more abundant life has entered into the realm of morals. How much more rich and full than the perfunctory righteousness of Palestine! How much more vital and fragrant than the code of etiquette regulating the conduct of the Greek and Roman! So far as morals are concerned, passing from the world before Christ to the world which felt the charm of His character and the glow of His spirit, is like passing from the dreary and flowerless monotony of geological vegetation to the luxuriance and variety of the current era, to the blossoming trees, the blooming meadows, the glory of orchid, lily and rose. In the geological epoch majestic forms of vegetation and blossoms of beauty were found, yet that age had no glory by reason of the excelling glory of the later stage, and so whilst former dispensations were lighted by examples of noble virtue, the fulness of goodness burst forth in the Christian age. Ethically speaking, the Apostolic writings let us into a watered

garden where the beauty of holiness lives and glows with original splendour.

And ever since the primitive period the Christian faith has accredited itself by the perfection of its moral fruits. Once when speaking in Manchester, Mr. Frederic Harrison, the eloquent Comtist, made this candid and significant confession: "It must be admitted that the Positivists could not claim the intensity of zeal, the inexhaustible spirit of humility, the charity, the devotion, the patience, the human love, the surrender of will and ambition they saw in many Bible Churches. He was free to confess these flowers of an ancient faith had yet to be reared amongst them—the perfect fruits of the Gospel had yet to be born of them." Of course the speaker went on to predict that Positivism would eventually produce finer flowers and richer fruits, but the consideration of these choicer growths may be fairly postponed until they appear; what is chiefly to be noted is the impartial testimony to the practical virtue of the Christian faith.

"Most holy." Christ expects from His disciples whatsoever things are just, honest, true, lovely and of good report in a degree of delicacy and perfection going altogether beyond the accepted ideals or the best achievements of the world. The glory of the celestial is one and the glory of the terrestrial is another, and in the Christian Church all the virtues ought to reveal a divine and heavenly beauty.

And it is of the very essence of the question that Christ expects this perfection of spirit and action in and from *all* His people. Philosophers are fond of affirming that saints must necessarily be as scarce as great poets, painters, or metaphysicians ; the pure, magnanimous, unearthy soul will be as rare as genius ; the morality of the average man cannot touch distinction. And what is far worse, the Christian Church itself has been slow to believe that all its members are under obligation to be "most holy." One of the greatest mistakes made by the Church in the early centuries was that it began to recognise a higher order and a lower order of Christians ; to recognise a double morality—a superfine morality being obligatory on the clergy, whilst an inferior type was allowed in the laity. The attempt to establish a higher order of Christians originated with the early Christian gnosticism, and the heresy has never been extirpated. In his day, Wicklif had to censure the habit of theologians in reducing the moral standard at pleasure, and pretending that whilst the *commands* of Christ are indeed binding upon every man, the *counsels* of Christ are obligatory only upon heroic Christians. Wicklif rightly contended that the commands and counsels are binding upon all, and that we must not discriminate between saints and people of an average sort. All may be saints. The temptation is still strong to make this separation, reckoning the few as susceptible of a rare moral perfection, and leaving

the rest to a commonplace virtue. But the clear meaning of Christ is, that all His people must be "most holy." Gradation is inseparable from ceremonial purity, one thing or place being more or less holy than another thing or place ; but the New Testament knows nothing of this gradation, for in calling men to holiness it calls them alike to be members of a glorious Church which has neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing.

II

The extended range.—"The whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy." This is another side of Ezekiel's thought about holiness. Whatever was profane was to be removed to the greatest distance. The actual temple had not put the profane things to a sufficient distance, but in the ideal temple they were to be thrust altogether out of sight ; the area of sanctity was to be widened ; instead of a "wall" between God and uncleanness there was to be a gulf ; evil things were to be pushed back and back, until they disappeared over the edge of the world. The thought of the text truly interpreted is, that everything on 'the earth is to become sacred and beautiful. Men of an unbelieving and cynical temper deny the possibility of any such sanctification of the world ; they laugh to scorn the idea that truth and justice and purity will ever penetrate the life of the

race. Renan, speaking of the Hebrew prophets, scoffs at "the impossible character of their dreams." He says: "They wanted justice, and time was needed to make it clear that the abuses which they called injustices were inherent in the natural conditions of existence, and that to suppress them it would have been necessary to suppress human life. . . . They were blind to all realities to believe that justice can govern the world."¹ So the blind man rebukes the seers.

But in opposition to this blighting conception, the Church of Christ believes in the utmost moral triumph for the individual and the race. To all who doubt the invincibility of righteousness comes the re-assuring voice of God: "Hearken unto Me, ye that despair of righteousness: I bring near My righteousness; it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel is My glory." The deadliest scepticism is that which denies the power and triumph of righteousness. The wildest socialist whose brain teems with Utopias is infinitely nearer the truth than the cynic who scoffs at the reign of righteousness as an impossibility. Such sceptics are the real enemies of the race; they would kill civilization in the eye. No, the abuses we call injustices are not inherent in the natural conditions of existence, they may all be purged; he is blind to all realities

¹ *History of the People of Israel.*

who can believe that injustice, lust and selfishness will permanently rule the world.

For is not the regeneration of the race ever going on, and a purer language being put into the lips of the people? We have said that one advance of morality lies in its application to a wider range of things, and no one can fairly regard history and contemporaneous facts without perceiving that the moral sense of mankind attains greater delicacy, that moral science grows as other sciences do, that the sovereignty of duty is widened with civilization. At the Crystal Palace a little while ago a Victorian Era Flower Show was held, the design of the exhibition of flowers and foliage being to show the progress of horticulture during the past sixty years. It seems that many new plants have been introduced during the present reign, and that we have a dozen varieties of flowers which, at the commencement of the period, were seen in only one or two shapes or tints. The students of horticulture have become Nature's artists, and they do so skilfully their beautiful work that the single-hued flower has yielded many shades—all imaginable tints have been mingled together in brightness and harmony. New coniferæ, begonias, carnations, orchids, and roses surprise and delight the spectators who have pleasure therein. Linnæus would marvel at the new paradise which blooms on the earth since he left us. This unique flower-show is also a parable of the original

moral effects of the last half-century. There has been an appreciably growing sense of temperance, justice, mercy and kindness, and these virtues have been developed in forms, and received applications unthought of by our forefathers. In commerce, industry, government, social relations and international relations a nobler conscience is being revealed, and new and delightful aspects of moral life constantly emerge, as horticulturists bring out in flowers new shapes, markings, and colours. God is ever revealing some fresh glory of the physical universe, and He is ever opening our eyes to see wonderful things out of His law.

It is exactly in this direction that we must strive to-day—to enforce the highest law in all the affairs of personal and public life. We must seek the more delicate conscience, the conscience that bears witness in the Holy Ghost, and bring it to determine every worldly calling and relation. All evil things, however cunningly disguised, are to be cast out ; all common things are to be transfigured. Some of our greatest painters do not bring into their work any of the splendid objects of nature—breadths of golden corn, trees in blossom, bespangled meadows, the pomp of forests, the mountain's purple patch, rainbows and the wings of butterflies—they simply paint a sandbank, a cutting, a ploughed field with a dim peasant or two and yet their picture is steeped in colour and rich in poetry, the perfume of the blossom

exhales from the dust, the rainbow is revealed in the clod, and more than the splendour of kings is suggested in the pathos of the peasant. So must we make common things grand with the touch of righteousness; so must we give to all commonplace life the beauty of holiness. "The whole limit shall be most holy." This shall be the law of our houses, the law of parliaments, the law of the municipality, the law of the exchange, the law of the shop, the office, the street. Despite Renan, the glorious day comes when men will do bitter penance for having given their brother an angry look; when they will condemn their soul to the treadmill for having put the big strawberry on the top; when they will rather don the cast-off rags of the leper than wear purple stained with a workman's blood or a sempstress' tear; when the ledger, the inkpot, the plough, the loom, all the vessels of industry, all the tools of toil, all the instruments of science shall be as the vessels of the altar.

All these lofty things are possible as Christ strengthens us. Our Lord did not enlarge the decalogue, He did not disclose original laws and principles of conduct, He gave us the power to reduce to practice the eternal law of righteousness. And this was what was most wanted. A critic of architecture complains of a Spanish cathedral that it embodies grand conceptions which have been most imperfectly realised; wherever you look you see "the poor carrying out of great ideas, the bungling of fine

lines, the trumpery character of rich ornamentation." And it is exactly thus that the world failed with morals. When Christ came He found splendid systems of law. The Jew had the glorious code of Sinai expanded by prophets and psalmists ; the Greek sage had written eloquently on moral science ; the Roman had built up a magnificent system of jurisprudence ; and yet civilization was dropping to pieces through the rottenness of public and private life. There was everywhere the unfailingly poor carrying out of great ideas, the bungling of fine lines, the vulgarising of noble precepts. Precisely here Christ came to our rescue. He magnifies in us His grace ; fills us with the Spirit of power and holiness ; stimulates us by the consciousness of His love and promise ; and the last great miracle is wrought, the righteousness of God becomes the righteousness of His people.

John Addington Symonds writes : "On the method of ethics depends the future of the human race, and one such discovery as Newton's law of gravitation in the field of morals would advance us ages forward." But there can be no such discovery. When Paul exulted, "The love of Christ constraineth us," he had made the grand discovery of which Symonds was still dreaming. The love of God in Christ is in morals what the law of gravitation is in nature, the sufficient sovereign principle, and where that love energizes the heart all moral perfection is possible.

THINGS UNDONE

“He left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.

***Josh.* xi. 15.**

V

THINGS UNDONE¹

“THIS year *omissions* have distressed me more than anything.” So speaks Andrew A. Bonar, concluding one of the years of his life. How many of us at this moment are similarly distressed! We have done things that we ought not to have done; we have left undone the things that we ought to have done. Let us think awhile about this disobedience of inaction. It is not merely that we have failed to carry out much of what we thought and felt and purposed (every life falls short of its best and largest imaginings), but we have left undone that “which the Lord commanded” — things of manifest duty and obligation.

I

The things undone are *many*. We have not left undone a duty here or there merely, we have the painful consciousness of having missed so much

¹ Preached on the last Sunday of the year.

that more seems undone than done. We sometimes boast of what we get into a day, or into a year ; but if all that we have left undone could suddenly stand revealed, how surprised and overwhelmed we should be ! How much more we might have been, how much more achieved, had we thrown ourselves into life with a quiet enthusiasm ! Darwin's biographer relates that the great scientist "never wasted a few spare minutes from thinking that it was not worth while to set to work." His golden rule was "taking care of the minutes." And so he became rich and accurate in knowledge, writing his wonderful books, instructing his own and future generations. If we had carried out this diligence in our daily life as Darwin carried it out in his intellectual life, how much richer our character would have been, how much more tranquil our conscience, how much larger our service to our generation !

How much more might we have done in the home ! We deal negligently with those about us until change or death takes them away ; then we are miserable with thoughts of so much omitted, so little done, of so many things forgotten, and so many more which might have been repaired. How much more might we have wrought in our circle of friends ! Chances to help, to counsel, to comfort them, we let slip through our irresolution. The real ghosts of human life are unwritten letters and unpaid visits. How much more might we have

done in the world ! We have loitered in the sheep-fold to hear the bleating of the sheep when we ought to have been in the high places of the field. We are ever ready with shuffling excuses for disregarded duties. How much more might we have given and taught and toiled in the Church of God ! Like the disciples, we sleep until some great opportunity is over, and then, after feeble regrets, we sleep again. We shirk, we dawdle, we postpone. We rarely let a day pass without yielding to the pusillanimous temper, and putting off things that ought to be done here and now. We are always evading manifest obligations, which are also precious privileges.

With what fiery energy the bird, the bee, or the butterfly, carries out the special commission with which it is entrusted ! Throughout earth and sky the various creatures fulfil their vocation unrestingly, leaving nothing undone of all that the Lord has commanded them. In nature everything seems to be done that can be done with the granted measure of time, space, material, and energy. But we are conscious of a very different, and far less satisfactory state of things in the human sphere. Here inertia, laziness, slipperiness, procrastination prevail. There are great gaps in our work ; the time-sheet of life leaves days and weeks unaccounted for ; large areas of our inheritance are unsown, un-reaped ; all kinds of beginnings abide sorrowfully incomplete. It is a strange world, the world of the

undone—the world that God has thought and man has not made—blank, unshapely, chaotic. We cannot comprehend all that it means ; we cannot imagine how the government of God will deal with it : and yet the realm of the unrealised, so strange and ominous, seems at least quite as big as the world that has been actualised by human energy and faithfulness.

II

The things undone are often *the things of greatest consequence*. Emerson speaks of “the science of omitting.” A very necessary and much neglected science. “The artist,” says Schiller, “may be known rather by what he omits.” The master of literary style is best recognised by his tact of omission. The orator declares his genius by what he leaves out as by what he puts into his discourses. And in life the science of omission must have a large place. In the vast, jostling, competing crowd of beings and things, of positions and principles, of interests and careers, of pains and pleasures, there must be stern selection, a science of omission. Life on its moral side, in its highest sense, becomes complete and successful by exclusion : if we are to make anything out of it, we must reject much. He who knows best what to exclude will make the best of the checkered scene.

When, however, an artist understands the science of omission, he leaves out the trivial, the vulgar, the irrelevant. Pater speaks of Watteau, the French artist, as "Sketching the scene to the life, but with a kind of grace, a marvellous tact of omission in dealing with the vulgar reality seen from one's own window." Yes, leaving out the vulgar features and commonplace detail. The literary master also selects the large, the beautiful, the essential. The orator seizes the salient aspects of his theme, the true, the pathetic, the grand, scrupulously avoiding whatever is prosaic and superfluous. But the defect in our moral life is, that in our science of omission we too often leave out the primary, the highest, the essential. The trivial, the fugitive, the inferior, the accidental, are given a place in our life; whilst the large the noble, the precious, and the supreme are excluded. We prove ourselves miserable artists in the highest art of all by adopting so freely the vulgar and trifling, and crowding out the Divine elements and opportunities which solicit us.

It is thus with us in questions of *character*. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." We place an exaggerated importance on some minor matter of conscience and conduct, all the time neglecting great

qualities and obligations. The weightier matters are more difficult and we evade them. It is thus with matters of *duty*. We shirk the calls demanding courage, diligence, and sacrifice, contenting ourselves by doing abundantly the things which are more immediately connected with our pride, our interest, or our pleasure. Invited to make our duty our delight, we are ingeniously intent upon making our delight our duty. We evade the severer calls, because they are inconvenient, disagreeable, irksome. The minor things ought to be done ; nothing is to be left out : but if anything is left out, it ought not to be the weightier matters. Here we are often condemned. Great principles are left out of our character, because they are difficult to acquire and maintain ; great duties are ignored, because they mean heroism and suffering ; great opportunities are forfeited, because they demand promptitude and resolution ; great works are declined, because they involve consecration and sacrifice.

Ah ! many of us have led lives busy enough, full of thought and solicitude ; we have been at it early and late, and yet have omitted the weighty things. Everything that pride, or interest, or pleasure demanded has been done to the last possibility : the things undone are those of conscientiousness, diligence, sacrifice, truth, and judgment, the service of our higher nature, the service of our generation, the service of God.

III

The things undone are things *for which we must be held responsible*. We are often deeply concerned, as indeed we ought to be, with the things we have done amiss ; but we are less troubled by the things left undone. Yet the negative side is as really sin as is the positive side. What is the deep meaning of the parable of the talents ? “ And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant.” No charge of misapplication of talents, of employing them in illegitimate speculations, of subsidising evil systems or movements ; it was simply a question of doing nothing. In these modern days it is rather fashionable for men of a certain type to stand quite aside from an active career. They are deeply impressed by the seriousness of life, by its difficulties, its mysteries ; they are keenly alive to its dangers and oppositions, and they do their best to keep clear of the embarrassments of public active life ; they decline, as far as may be, its relationships, its obligations, its trials, its honours, its sorrows. They will tell you that they have no gifts, no calling, no opportunity. But, however disguised, these lives are slothful and guilty. Such men may do little amiss, they may escape many errors and failures ; but their guilt is found in what they have left undone, unattempted,—

the undone being worse than the badly done, the unattempted being worse than failure.

Most of us have somewhat of this slothful temper. We are chargeable with neglect in many particulars. True, we gloss with mild names this shirking of duty. We call it expediency, standing over, modesty, deliberation, forgetfulness, oversight ; but it ought to be called sloth, hypocrisy, cowardice, sin. How great is our guilt on this side of life ! How much undone for God, for man, for our own perfecting ! Well may we pray in the last words of Archbishop Ussher, " Lord, forgive my sins, especially my sins of omission " ; or, in the appeal of the Litany : " That it may please Thee to give us true repentance ; to forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances " ! " Who can understand his errors ? cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

For the future, let us put into life more purpose, passion, and will. Let us be more definite, prompt, unflinching. Let us be at once more enthusiastic and more methodical. Let us not allow ourselves in the neglect of anything that we know to be our duty. Let us determine to be faithful here—to put more into life, and to get more out of it, watching against every indulgent mood that would weaken our spirit and lessen our opportunity. The shadow of the undone is one of the deepest shadows of life, and no doom is more terrible than that of the slothful servant.

WHITE ALREADY

B.S.

G

**“ Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest ?
behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields ; for
they are white already to harvest.”—*John* iv. 35.**

VI

WHITE ALREADY

OUR Lord here teaches the ripeness of the world for the highest blessing ; He declares that the spirits of men are ready for ingathering into the Church of God. The fields of Samaria were at this time probably green ; but the Samaritans themselves were fields white unto the harvest. In the natural world are spaces for waiting ; the spiritual world, the world of souls, was already ripe. Let us consider this, and may the Lord of the harvest so bless our meditations that we shall go back to our reaping with braver hearts, stronger hands, and keener sickles.

Men everywhere are religious—that is, they have a certain religiousness of nature ; they have religious ideas, capacities, instincts, aspirations. In some instances the religious instincts are dreadfully starved, the religious ideas degraded, the religious sensibilities dulled, but the religious nature is there—the sense of infinity, of dependence, duty, accountability, futurity. All men have spiritual hopes and

fears—spiritual thoughts, sentiments and desires. It is not the business of the Church to create a religious sense in men ; that is already there. So far, then, are men ready for the message of the Gospel. They are everywhere able to comprehend its truths, to receive its grace, to realize its blessings.

Not only, however, is religious capacity present ; there is in all men a *felt need* for the truths, the grace, and the hope of the Gospel. Everywhere men are feeling after God, if haply they may find Him, and so find life and peace. These longings are not by any means equally vivid ; they are not equally understood ; certainly they are not equally expressed, but we are persuaded that they are everywhere existent and operative.

But, whilst we grant all this, we often fail to believe in the immediate readiness of mankind for the salvation that is in Christ ; we suppose that much has to be done before we can hope to see men saved. Just as the disciples regarded the salvation of the Samaritans as far off, so do we regard the salvation of certain individuals, classes and races as far removed and almost incredible. Must there not be sowing before there is reaping ? Must there not be ripening before there is reaping ? Must there not be ripening forces before there is a ripening ? Such are the questions we propose to ourselves in the presence of unconverted men and nations, and we conclude that their conversion is quite remote. This

spirit of doubtfulness and postponement our Lord rebukes: "I say unto you, The fields are white already." The sowing has already taken place; the ripening forces are already at work; the ripening is reached; all you have to do, says the Lord of the harvest, is to put in the sickle and gather the immortal sheaves.

Let us observe several cases in which our Lord's rebuke applies to-day.

I

Take the conversion of the *young*. We do not expect children immediately to feel, to understand, to obey the saving grace. The children must wait—wait for experience before they can know God, before they can enter Christ's kingdom and fellowship. Must there not be sowing before there is reaping? — a ripening before there is reaping? "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." So we instruct our children, encourage them, discipline them, but generally we are much surprised if they evince anything like a religious experience; indeed, we usually look on such manifestations with suspicion and apprehension as on premature bloomings and blossomings in garden and orchard. But here our Lord's rebuke comes in. Must there not be a sowing, ripening forces, ripening? When shall we understand that God is always before His Church in

the kingdom of souls? Remember the doctrine of prevenient grace. We believe that God gives a secret light, strength, bias to the soul in its very origin, and that, as soon as we awake to consciousness, we find within ourselves the sense alike of law and grace, of high calling and solemn obligation. A Rabbinical legend tells that when the law was given forth at Sinai, all the yet unborn souls of the Jewish nation were assembled to hear it. There is a deep truth in the legend: and not only were the yet unborn souls of all Israelites there; *all* unborn souls were at Sinai, and they come into the world familiar with the echo of its thunder. Let us complete the legend. All unborn souls were also assembled at Calvary; of His fulness they have all received, and they enter the world strengthened with the majestic grace. "Not in utter nakedness, but trailing clouds of glory do we come"—yes, the wondrous clouds of Sinai and Zion cling to us in our infancy, and we are conscious of Divine law and love, of duty and grace, as soon as we are conscious of anything.

We are often astonished at the spiritual capacity of children, at their deep thoughts, their clear experience of the things of God! As Paul wrote to Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures"—*known* them, known their saving power. Little children cannot understand theology, but they can enjoy religion. They do not understand entomology, yet they admire a butterfly; they know

little of botany, yet they love the daisy ; they are ignorant of optics, yet their heart leaps up when they behold a rainbow in the sky. We enjoyed nature vividly when its science was entirely unknown to us ; and children enjoy religion, although they know nothing of its definitions, evidences, and reasonings. Go to them at once with a spiritual appeal, and expect the spiritual effect. Do not talk of their need of experience. If a chrysalis be placed in an icehouse, its development into the perfect insect may be retarded for years ; but take it out of the icehouse into a hothouse, and it flutters a thing of beauty in a few days. So with our children ; surrounded by a certain frigid atmosphere, they are likely to have a pretty long experience before they awake to godliness ; but surround them with a warm atmosphere, rich with spiritual stimulations, and at once, perchance, they shall soar heavenwards, all the bright characters of grace revealed in them richly.

II

Take the conversion of the *masses*. How sceptical we are about any deep change being effected immediately in these ! A great work is first to be done, there is a long time to wait. "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

1. Take such of the masses as are *ignorant*. Many of the people about us are shockingly ignorant,

—let it be granted, ignorant alike of the rational and the religious. What do they want? Education, say many. With their crass ignorance and stupidity how can they recognise the noblest truths? But on trial it turns out very differently: the people intellectually despicable discover a spiritual faculty of the utmost acuteness. “The common people heard Him gladly.” They had ears to hear, hearts to understand, wills to obey. It was exactly on this ground that the royal Reaper reaped many golden sheaves. So was it again when Wicklif appealed to the serfs of Leicestershire; when Luther preached to the peasantry of Germany; when Wesley exhorted the colliers of Kingswood and the miners of Cornwall. It is thus with illiterate men and women to-day. Without knowing arithmetic, they feel the worth of the soul; without skill in languages, they know the voice of God; without the sense of æsthetics, they admire the beauty of holiness; ignorant of the sciences of time, they grasp the science of eternity. There is no denying this; the rudest, darkest people have often a rich moral susceptibility, a keen apprehension of the great truths of the spirit. We have often reason to remember the surprise of Christ: “I thank Thee, O Father, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”

2. Take such of the masses as are *worldly*. They are apparently altogether immersed in the secular

element ; they seem completely destitute of religious thought, feeling, solicitude, and susceptibility. And yet, let us be sure that the Spirit of God is at work beneath all this thick clay ; these carnal, worldly souls have their seasons of solemn thought and pathos, of hope and fear. There seems no life whatever in a garden in the early spring ; everything looks dead, twice dead. But it is not really so. Under the surface the seeds are swelling, the roots are full of ferment ; within the bark of the trees is as much movement as in London streets, every fibre is tingling with force, the sap is coursing along every subtle channel, and all that is wanted is a sprinkling of rain, a breath of south wind, a kiss of the sun, and the branches will break into blossom, the earth laugh into flowers. There is nothing to betray what is going on within, but it is going on all the same. So, my brethren, society often looks strangely unpromising ; there is no sign of spiritual life in any form ; and yet the spiritual is there ; the apparently indifferent feel, they fear, they argue within themselves, they weep before God, in secret they breathe many a prayer. We often find one loving, honest appeal is enough, and the apparently materialized, callous heart has bowed before the Word. "The Lord is in this *place*, and I knew it not." And we have often to say, 'The Lord is in this *man*, and I knew it not.'

3. Take such of the masses as are *vicious*. Coarse,

sensual, profligate, drunken, blaspheming, how far they seem from the kingdom of God ! What do these want ? Reformation, say the wise of this world ; they must reform before we can expect religion to lay hold of them, before we can expect them to lay hold of religion. Another mistake ; guilty of crimson sins, men are yet white unto harvest. How readily Christ found the missing chord in publicans and harlots ! We see it in this Samaritan woman. Keim, the rationalistic critic, is sorely puzzled because Christ addresses the loftiest and most spiritual utterances to a sinful, sensual woman, and on that ground he declares the narrative is not literal ; but here is a great truth that Christ wished His Church to learn—that the guiltiest men and women are able to apprehend the sublimest truths, truths which convict, truths which save. I remember hearing one tell that his conversion was brought about on this wise : he was a desperate character, and one day he was drunk and fighting ; at night he turned into some hovel, and there, whilst muddled, covered with blood and dirt, a thunderstorm awoke him. Strangely enough in the thunder God spoke to his soul ; he prayed, he vowed to live a better life, and for more than forty years he lived it. Who that had seen that poor wretch, filthy, bleeding, swearing, would have thought that there was a spark of spirituality in him or that he was prepared to listen to the Majesty of the skies ? And yet the forlorn fellow was ripe for

the garner. Men of the world do not like these sudden conversions, I know ; they feel that there ought to have been a succession of stages, reformations, instructions, preparations ; but in treating of embryology scientific men tell us of "condensed evolution," of stages taking place and succeeding each other in a few months in the individual, although they occupy millions of years perhaps in the race. Now, if any one objects to these rapid transformations of sinners into saints, I reply, condensed evolution. That poor wretch in the hovel—condensed evolution ; Saul of Tarsus — striking case of condensed evolution ; penitent thief—crowning instance of condensed evolution. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Go then to the crowd : ignorant, worldly, immoral as they may be, the Spirit of God is striving with them ; and if whilst the Spirit says, Come, the Bride also cries, Come, out of the stones, hard as they are miry as they are, shall arise children unto Abraham.

III

Take the conversion of the *sceptical*. How far these seem from the kingdom of God ! We regard them despairingly. What do they want ? Oh, they need instruction and argument, say many. No ; not nearly so much as we think. Men cannot all at once get rid of their religious nature. Our system makers find it difficult to get God out of philosophy ;

when they think they have expelled Him by one door, He comes in again at another ; and certainly they cannot keep Him out of their own personal thought and experience. We think of a sceptic as of something inhuman, but it is not so. His scepticism is not his deepest self. He has a religious self of which he cannot get rid by an intellectual decision. "Hath not a Jew eyes ? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions ? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is ? If you prick us, do we not bleed ? if you tickle us, do we not laugh ? if you poison us, do we not die ?" Is not the atheist also of the same flesh and blood ? Hath not an atheist eyes to look out on this wondrous universe ? Hath he not spiritual instincts and longings not easily denied, strange thoughts he cannot suppress, arguments within himself he cannot answer ? Hath he not senses, passions, affections saturated with the supernatural ? Whilst you sometimes doubt your belief, is not the atheist compelled to doubt his doubts ? Does he not share all our earthly experiences, so many of which drive us back on the unearthly ? Pricked to the heart, does he not bleed ? Are there not moments when, rejoicing in good gifts, he has suggestions of a good Giver ? Does he not die, and does not the grave give him pause ? My brethren, our

infidelity is on the surface, our religion deep down ; our infidelity is in our opinion, our religion is in our instincts, our appetites, our aspirations, our deepest nature, in the very roots of our being. Therefore, go to the unbeliever with personal appeals, direct appeals, and expect a becoming response. Unbelievers are riper than you think. Speak not so much to the sceptic as to the man. Some one said that Adam Smith wrote as if he believed "that there was a Scotchman inside every man"; you cannot be wrong in assuming a man inside every sceptic, one with all the feelings, sentiments, outlooks of a man. Oh! speak to that man the great thoughts, the seasonable thoughts, the loving thoughts, of the Gospel, and you shall not speak in vain.

IV

Take the conversion of the *savage* portion of our race. Objectors urge, Now, can this be right, sending these spiritual, lofty doctrines to cannibals? Are they ready for the highest truth? What do these low heathen want? Our friends reply, Civilization. "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Work your way to religion by successive steps—knowledge, commerce, industry, government. Nay ; these, too, are ready, white to harvest as were the magic-loving Samaritans. Many sceptical writers are very angry with the Church of Christ for preach-

ing immediately to debased tribes the deep, pure truths of Christianity. A nation, they declare, must go through a succession of stages before it attains the strength and clearness which enable it to receive the refined and sublime articles of our faith, and to attempt at a bound to make Christians of such people is much the same as if one should attempt to make a man out of a child without the intermediate stages of boyhood and adolescence. "Nature," say they, "never leaps." The process of evolution is always continuous—no leaps. No leaps, indeed ! Then there are cases which seem very like leaps. The caterpillar is transformed into a pupa,—a dead, colourless, shapeless, frowsy thing ; and yet in the very hour whilst you watch, the butterfly bursts forth complete, splendid, a winged beauty in the summer carnival. Now, there was a leap there. Oh, no, says the man of science, it was not a real leap ; though certain stages seem to be omitted, they really took place ; it only seems a leap. Very good, we need not argue. See the penitent thief, or the brother in the hovel saved in an hour : it was not a real leap, the Spirit of God worked the intermediate stages in the silence and darkness ; it only seemed a leap. And so with Fiji : fifty years ago it was cannibal, to-day it is Christian. But let not science object, we are ready to allow that it was not a real leap, it only seemed a leap ; it was the butterfly coming out of the chrysalis. God was in Fiji before John Hunt. God is in all other

dark places working the preparation of the heart. "The isles *wait* for His law." Let the Church take that law, and you shall see some more leaps, or what looks very like them; out of seemingly hopeless worms of humanity shall arise angel shapes, glorious in holiness, mounting heavenwards.

V

Take the conversion of the *world at large*. The world generally seems a long way from conversion—thus it appears to the carnal eye; and yet the heathen nations everywhere are white breadths ready for the sickle. The Jews thought the Samaritans very unripe, and yet Christ showed how ready they were for the richest blessing, and we see the same in the Acts of the Apostles. The Samaritan woman represents susceptible heathendom; and her nation itself was typical of the great pagan nations of to-day. The Samaritans had their temples, festivals, scriptures, as India and China have to-day—a strange jumble of truth and error, spirituality and necromancy was their religion, as is the current religion of the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindoo. And yet He who knew what was in man, to whom all hearts are open, saw these Samaritans bending like bearded grain for the harvester. And at this very moment Christ's prophetic eye took in all mankind, and His words are not overstrained when we

find in them an assurance of the readiness of the whole Gentile world for the saving truth. Lift up *your* eyes, and behold the Chinese millions coming, the teeming millions of India and Africa ; moved by the Spirit of God, they are inquiring their way to Zion, they are stretching out their hands unto God. The *Missionary Notices* contain a most interesting letter from South Africa, in which a missionary gives an account of a native class meeting. He tells how one grey-haired old woman, her shrivelled face drawn with emotion, declared : " My soul is a thing which I cannot fathom, but my heart is bleeding for God." That expresses the whole situation of the heathen world. Full of mysteries, perplexities, longings, their heart is bleeding for God. Oh! run, point them to Him who counts the stars and binds up the broken hearts.

The world waits for the Church to go in and gather the living corn. Do you ask where is the sowing? It is done. The New Testament represents the Church as a reaper, not as a sower; Christ is the Sower. He moves in His Spirit among the million, scattering living germs in the red furrows of human hearts, and the Church is to follow reaping where it has not sown, gathering where it has not strawed. If the devil sows tares in the dark, another Sower in the dark sows harvests of light. Do you ask where the ripening forces are? They have done their work already. The sun acts where it does not shine. The

roots of trees are vitalized by the sunshine, although they are not bathed in it ; nay, gems hidden in the rock are said to owe their form to solar radiations. So, in the kingdom of souls, the Light of the World acts where He does not manifestly shine. Where there are no external signs of Christ's action He moves along subtle lines of influence, and gives to souls in dark places divine susceptibilities and desires. Go to the youngest child, the most illiterate peasant, the most abandoned sinner, the most benighted pagan, and expect forthwith glorious fruit. We are not waiting for God, God is waiting for us, and the harvest is spoiling through our sloth and unbelief.

PALMS AND WILLOWS

“Ye shall take you on the first day . . . branches of palm trees
. . . and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the
Lord your God seven days.”—*Lev.* xxiii. 40.

VII

PALMS AND WILLOWS

THE palm stands upright in the sun ; the willow droops and weeps. The one is the symbol of gladness, renown, victory, immortality ; the other of sadness, weakness, humiliation, exile, death. Every year the Israelites were to bring both symbols into the tabernacle, and to rejoice before the Lord. We stand a long way from this ancient festival ; but we are still familiar with the sentiments and experiences to which it gave expression. Let us bring the great teaching of the text home to ourselves.

I

Palm and willow are associated in human life.

1. It is going far to say that anything appears in the life of all ; but we may confidently affirm that the palm and the willow are found *in the life of all men*. At the florists' shops we see this advertisement : "Bouquets and wreaths for sale." The first is the metaphor of gaiety, the second of grief ; and both are

such common experiences that the florist gets a living by catering for the singing multitude, which is also the weeping multitude.

The velvet touch of the palm is universally familiar. All have days of sunshine, of success, of victory : days in which they realise cherished dreams, triumph over difficulties, return from exile, taste radiant blessing and enjoyment. These days come into every life, although many of us contrive to look as if they never did. They come into the life of great and small, rich and poor, young and old.

The sting of the willow is equally familiar. Some know ill health ; they gradually fade, or are broken by sickness in a day. Many know wrecked fortunes. As we read in Isaiah : " Therefore the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have laid up, shall they carry away to the brook of the willows " (xv. 7). Multitudes know what this pathetic journey means. Many know bitter bereavements. Many know a broken heart. Joy and sorrow belong to the common lot. Every one who hears me will acknowledge that trees of the sun and willows of the brook have fringed all the path of his pilgrimage.

2. The palm and willow are *closely* associated in the life of all. We have recently read the experiences of a traveller in South America. He tells of the incomparable beauty and variety of the foliage, of the vivid colours of leaf and flower, of the richness

and exuberance of the landscape, which make the finest woodland scenery of Northern Europe a sterile desert in comparison ; he is enraptured with the rare birds and curious insects ; he glows as he describes colossal, handsome butterflies, eight inches across the wings, dyed in silver, scarlet, blue, gold, and all kinds of mottled splendours ; and the superb orchids fill him with delight. All of which, as we read, made us wish that we were there. But on the same page comes very different music. The explorer suffers terribly from loathsome ticks ; ferocious insects attack him until the blood runs in little streams ; he is laid up by a severe fever ; he is nearly bitten by a rattlesnake. All of which, as we read, made us thankful that we were not there. But this adventure in the tropical forest exactly reflects our earthly life. As this traveller found glorious things and ghastly things in the same landscape, so do we find success and failure, rapture and heart-break, triumph and tragedy, in the same year, in the same month, in the same week, nay, often in the same day. Our bright and sorrowful experiences are surprisingly intermingled ; the same event makes us smile and sigh, we weep and laugh as we survey the two aspects of the same thing. Out of our good fortune springs our direst agony ; out of our tragedies arise our richest compensations—as in the old poet, whenever a leaf was stripped from a certain tree it was immediately replaced by a leaf of gold. Our willows grow out of palms ; our palms change to

willows. We carry the palm in one hand, the willow in the other. In a church the other day we heard an organist who in his voluntary contrived to mix up the Hallelujah Chorus and the Dead March in Saul. Whatever that organist may be as a musician, he is certainly a true poet, for it is exactly thus in life—sorrowful, we still rejoice, and in the days of sunshine trouble chills us as snow in winter.

The writers beloved of the million, dear to successive generations, are the men of imagination who possessed the amplitude of vision to see the double aspect of human life, and the literary skill to express that vision. Poets like Shakespeare and Burns, novelists like Scott and Thackeray, humorists like Hood, theologians like John Bunyan, saw vividly both aspects of human life ; they felt its vanity and painfulness, and yet intensely appreciated all that was joyous and beautiful in it ; and it is this fact that gives magic to their page. We weary of an author who is all palm, and we just as soon discover that an author who is all willow mocks the reality of things ; but the writer who catches the “psychological moment” when strength and weakness, grandeur and humiliation, ecstasy and agony, meet and blend, and when, like children, we laugh and cry at the same time,—this is the poet interesting to nations and ages. The secret of the charm of the hymn-book lies in the fact that it has a pæan on one page and on the next a dirge ; nay, often because it

has both on the same page. Revelation, as a whole, is so fascinating and precious to the race, because it mirrors vividly the sufferings which mix with love and life, the humiliation which blends with power and greatness in the inexorable lot of man—the same sacred page having a black border and a gilt edge.

II

It is our highest duty and privilege to bring both palm and willow before the Lord.

1. We must bring both before the Lord *in the spirit of thankfulness*: “Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.”

Thankful for the palm. You say it is natural to be thankful for the palm. Is it? It is much more natural to flourish it over our own head. If we enjoy health, we are ready with the explanation that we have always been prudent; if we are successful in business, we congratulate ourselves that we know our way about; if we attain distinction, we feel that our merit has been rewarded at last, only it has taken the world a long time to find it out. It is natural to complain; we are slow to appreciate and praise. Mind that you glorify God for all the pleasant and joyful things—for the times of health and wealth; for the love and friendship which are the golden embroidery of common days; for the table spread in the wilderness, which is no less a miracle because it is a commonplace; for spiritual

illuminations, enrichments, and victories; for ten thousand blessings of earth and heaven. We remember hearing a good woman in a religious meeting profess: "I came here to-night because I want my friends to help me to praise God." She was so filled with the sense of God's love and goodness that she felt a solo inadequate, she sought a chorus. We grumble often enough, and wish people to cry with us and for us; but how rarely are we so full of gratitude and joy as to solicit help to give expression to the swelling soul! And yet most beautiful and becoming is that mood of wonder and thanksgiving! "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God." The psalmist is again and again so full of appreciation and delight that he is constrained to borrow the instrumentation of all nature to express his soaring, adoring soul. He calls for the trumpet of the storm, the clashing cymbals of the sea, the giant pedal pipes of the forest, the magical strings of that grand old harper the wind, the lute of the bird, the bass-viol of the dragon and the deep, the silver triangle of the stream that goeth softly: he longs for the chorus of the earth and the music of the spheres worthily to set forth the praises of the glorious Giver of every good and every perfect gift. Oh! that we more frequently knew this rapturous mood. Take care that you do not receive your gifts in the spirit of vanity, or thought-

lessness, or selfishness : do not flourish your palm over your own head, or cast it on the path for your own feet ; remember its source, and lay it where the elders lay their crowns.

Thankful for the willow. Decorating our churches for the harvest festival, we bring in all kinds of lovely and dainty things : painted apples, golden corn, branches of blossom ; iridescent creepers climb the pillars ; lilies, roses, orchids decorate each coign of vantage. But why do we not bring in those other products of field and forest ? Where is the branch stripped by the caterpillar, the sheaf spoiled and blackened by the rain, the rose cankered by the blight ? We make conspicuous the prize flower ; but where are the thorns and briars ? The fragrant myrtle proclaims itself ; but where is the nightshade ? The orchid gleams ; but where is the spotted toadstool ? The graceful palm crowns the show ; but where is the drooping willow ? The fact unconsciously revealed in these exclusions is, that the race has not seen the goodness of nature's dark side, the blessing that springs from the austerity of life. Yet we know that the richest civilisation arises out of a bitter struggle with painful conditions ; noblest character is the product of sanctified tribulation. Jacob was a poor creature until his thigh was put out, only when he ceased to look like a king did he become one ; Paul until he knew the thorn in the flesh knew not the full grace of his Master. When

Dante entered Purgatory, he was first girded with a willow plucked from the waters of affliction, to teach, says Ruskin, "that glory begins in suffering, and all power in humility." Mind, then, that you bless God for disadvantage and tribulation. As Dr. George Matheson feelingly writes: "My God, I have never thanked Thee for my thorn. I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but not once for my thorn. I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensation for my cross; but I have never thought of my cross as itself a present glory. Teach me the glory of my cross; teach me the value of my thorn. Show me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have made my rainbow."

Take both palm and willow to God in thankfulness; for He gave both, and was just as good when He gave the one as when He gave the other. The palm shall be to you a tree of life, and, whatever the naturalist may say, the willow shall bear celestial fruit. And be sure of this: if you bring palm and willow before God in the spirit of holy gratitude and trust, you will never take them away as you brought them. When you bring your palm, it is the withering grass of an earthly blessing; but once laid at the feet of God, it is changed into the immortal amaranth of a spiritual benediction. And coming to God with the willow, you do not take a willow away; it blooms into a palm of victory and peace.

2. We must bring both palm and willow before the Lord, *that we may find grace to bear them.*

Grace to sustain the palm. It is not easy to carry the golden palm of opulence. J. A. Symonds, writing to his sister, says: "You say the prosperous people are rather trying. I think they are." Prosperity is prone to breed in us very disagreeable qualities. It is not easy to bear the spreading laurel of popularity and fame. Let God call us out of obscurity and put into our hand a palm, and directly we begin to strut. Neither is it easy to carry with simplicity and safety the purple-flowered branch of pleasure. All the things coveted by flesh and blood are confessedly perilous to the moral man.

We need much grace to sustain the willow. I often see people in such deep suffering and distress that I say to myself, 'Nothing less than the grace that sustained the martyrs will do here.' Life is again and again strangely searching and terrible.

It is impossible to say which aspect of life is the less trying and dangerous to the moral man, the joyous or the bitter. A little while ago there was a discussion as to whether it is easier to bear a hot or a cold climate. One traveller affirmed that he had lived in Alaska and Siberia, knowing darkness, frost, and hunger; and he testified that it was easier to bear these severities than to endure the inconveniences of the tropics. When he spoke thus he was in the tropics. If he had been with Nansen at

the North Pole, he would probably have preferred the land of sunshine and myrtles. Just as climatic extremes are trying ordeals to the physical man, so are sharply contrasted circumstances trying to faith and moral principle. All positions are exacting, full of peril, calling for the utmost courage, patience, and resolution. It is essential that we take palm and willow before the Lord, that we may find grace to help in time of need.

It is delightful to remember that our great High Priest is touched with a feeling of our infirmity, and that He can sympathise with our manifold experiences. Ours is not an astronomical or a metaphysical deity, but God in Christ, sympathetically conscious of all our variations of circumstance and feeling. One Sunday in the Christian year is Passion Sunday, and the next Palm Sunday; our Master knew the sting of the thorn and the pleasant touch of the palm, and in His life both came within a few days, as within a few days they come in ours. So we may confidently commit both palm and willow to Him, and He will soothe us, sober us, strengthen us, save us to the uttermost.

We speak sometimes of a man's "palmy days," and when we do so we invariably think of the days behind him. A great singer sometimes lingers on the stage after his vocal gifts have been impaired; and when strangers give vent to their disappointment, the answer is ready, "Ah! but you should have heard

him in his palmy days." We have seen an old orator trying to make himself heard and understood by a large audience, until after a while the meeting in that beguiling manner which distinguishes public assemblies requested the old man to "speak up," whereupon he sat down. "He made them hear in his palmy days," said one in the crowd. We have seen a veteran cricketer go to the wickets, and retire after a very short innings. Said the spectators, "It was different in his palmy days." But really if we live wisely and faithfully the palmy days are before us. The great and glorious things are to come. The moon sets behind us ; our face is to the sunrise. We have some slight knowledge of the palm now. God grants us this lest the spirit of man should fail before Him, and the souls that He has made ; but, in the main, this is the zone of the willow—the land of the palm is on the other side the river. They are all palms there. No place for the willow. No more failure and defeat ; all are conquerors with palms in their hands. No more exile ; we have returned from Babylon to Zion. No more sickness and sorrow ; the Lord God hath wiped away tears from all faces. No more death ; buried in weakness, we are raised in power, and, like our Lord, we are alive for evermore. Palms everywhere, palms always, evergreens of the everlasting spring. "For which cause we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

THE SECRET OF STRENGTH

B.S.

I

“In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.”—*Zechariah* xii. 8.

VIII

THE SECRET OF STRENGTH

THE text in the fulness of its meaning is a prediction of the greatness of the sons of God in the then kingdom of the future. It was a glimpse into the world that was to be, the world in which it is our privilege to live. The prophet saw the Judah and Jerusalem of Messianic times in which a wondrous strengthening of the people should take place. The weakest, not strong on his feet, will be as David, the hero, whose ankles shook not (Ps. xviii. 36)—like divine, superhuman, heavenly beings. The sense is as appellative and comprehensive as in the Psalm: "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (viii. 5). The language is further specialized and also intensified by the clause—like the angel of Jehovah, the angel of the Divine presence who goes before them in battle.¹ In the conflict with the heathen nations the Lord will endow the inhabitants of Jerusalem with marvellous strength, in which they

¹ Orelli.

shall overcome all their foes ; and this promise, justly interpreted, signifies that in Christ humanity shall realize royal strength, the mastery over principalities and powers, triumphing over all enemies.

I

A spiritual faith is pre-eminently calculated to fashion great character. The mass of men fail to realize the faculty and power which inhere in them, and this very largely by no fault of their own. Their circumstances never call forth their rich gifts, and they remain unconscious of their royalty. The opportunity that solicits and kindles the soul never occurs, and so the multitude pass away, proud of many things, yet largely unaware of that intrinsic greatness which is more than all beside. The naturalist tells us that Alpine plants embrace nearly every type of the plant life of northern and temperate climes, in endless diversities of form and colour, but chastened in tone and diminished in size through the severity of the regions in which they exist. They include almost invisible orchids, with possibilities equal to those of their most gorgeous brethren ; Lilliputian trees which are miniatures of massy pines, the moss amid which they grow being actually higher than the pines ; tiny lilies and bluebells, kinsmen of the flowers which outshine Solomon ; dwarf ferns which, although they peep from narrowest crevices of

rocky places, are of the same family as the noble plant that on more propitious spots enchants us with its grace ; midget evergreen shrubs, perfect in leaf and blossom and fruit as any that grow in our gardens ; creepers, hardly lifting themselves above the earth, crawling among the stones, but with colour as lovely as the gorgeous climbers of tropic woods ; microscopic foliage growths, the modest counterfoils of the specimens which adorn our parterres ; and numberless minute plants that have utterly lost the stature of their lowland brethren, whilst yet retaining pathetic relics of the beauty and majesty of the princelier vegetation. Snow and ice and biting winds have dwarfed them into insignificance, although the terrible conditions fail to rob them of their essential character. Living in relentless regions, "where feeble world-heat and world-force" are quenched, they have become as if they were not, their intrinsic glory almost utterly suppressed and hidden. Yet give them happier conditions of sun and soil and shelter, and they would soon rival in splendour the peerage of oriental paradises. And it is much after this sort with the great mass of men. Their circumstances are singularly unfavourable to their development: their noble rage is repressed, their faculties are unchallenged, their wealth of affection, genius and energy is so much treasure buried in commonplace and monotony ; they perish apparently in the accomplishment of minor and subordinate

ends. Frequently in obscure men and women we behold pathetic evidences of grand latent capacities of mind and heart, striking suggestions of possible greatness and glory, as in the Alpine embryos we recognise the lingering splendour of palm and pine, of myrtle and orchid, only the exhausting struggle of life has rendered it impossible for them to realize in any adequate measure their inherent greatness. It is enough that they wrestle valiantly with a bitter environment, and manage to retain even faint signs of their Divine origin and destiny.

But from time to time events occur which awaken the dormant energies of the soul, and men hitherto unknown start up in heroic proportions. Misfortune sometimes informs us of our strength. In days of ease and affluence men may evince no energy of mind or depth of character, but adversity puts them on their mettle and they reveal the highest qualities. Opposition will sometimes effect the transformation. When Curran was mocked for his stammering, his soul took fire and henceforth he was known as one of the world's chief speakers. Love effects marvelous expansions and exaltations. Everybody knows how, under the influence of the sublime passion, Quentin Matsys grew out of a blacksmith into a great painter. Ambition often evokes latent power. At the trumpet call of Cromwell or Washington, at the bugle call of Garibaldi or Lincoln, shopkeepers, artisans, brewers, and peasants awake into generals,

orators, statesmen, and conquerors. Extraordinary opportunity and impulse startle obscure men into greatness. Clive and Warren Hastings were only clerks in the service of the East India Company, but under the stress of extraordinary difficulty and the solicitation of rare opportunity they developed splendid military and administrative talents. When we consider these things, we see the reasonableness of the apostolic injunction, "Honour all men." In many we see little to honour: their work seems trivial, their intelligence dim, their virtues tame. But we must remember how much of the man is suppressed, obscured, reserved, awaiting a more propitious future. What looks mean and meagre in the snow will glow in the sun. He is no true lover of nature who gives all his admiration to the gaudy exotics of the conservatory, and despises the dwindling forms and delicate bits of colour on the savage Alpine heights where a blade of grass cannot grow; and so the true critic of humanity does not exhaust his wonder and flattery on the brilliant and famous, but honours all lowly life, remembering the mystic wealth which sleeps in it, and which will blossom out whenever it pleases God to give it the kiss of the sun.

The most striking illustration, however, of the awakening up of human nature, of the potential becoming the actual, of the weak becoming strong and glorious, is found in the kingdom of God. We

are told sometimes that religious faith dwarfs human nature ; but it would be just as accurate to say that the sun dwarfs the palm, or that the mountain air blights the cedar. Everything about the truth and hope of Christ is calculated to unlock a man's faculties, to evoke his latent power, to bring out all the possibilities of his nature. Does misfortune arouse men? Religion opens our eyes to supreme disasters and difficulties. Does opposition call forth self-respect and fortitude? Religion plunges us into a sea of conflicts that we may attain our prerogatives of honour and freedom. Does affection inspire men? Religion kindles in the breast sublimest admiration and love. Does ambition gird men to great enterprise? Religion sets before us splendid hopes which stir the soul to its depths. Does striking opportunity elicit power and aspiration? Religion teaches that this whole life is a chance and calling of incomparable grandeur. The knowledge of God and of our relation to Him familiarizes us with great thoughts, emotions, aims. We then have something to love, to live for, to fight for. We unfold wings ; we have gained lofty conceptions and courage ; our whole being is lifted into a new and delightful competence.

The religious man is a strong man. A noble religion quickens a man's intellectual powers, rendering him energetic and capable in all relations ; but especially in his moral life is he conscious of a new

conquering force. We see this in the histories of the Old Testament. Herdsmen, husbandmen, unknown men, under the action of the Spirit of God suddenly grew into commanding characters, in the interests of righteousness and truth braving alien armies. And in other lands and spheres than those of the Old Testament do men prove the power of faith to lift them above the sense of weakness, difficulty, and peril ; to fill them with resolution and enthusiasm ; to give them the militant genius, the instinct of victory. The believer with a noble faith, with a creed in which the higher truths find fair expression, is strong to deal with the baser elements of his own heart, bravely seeking to quell its conspiracies and insurrections. He is strong to deal with the almost infinite temptations of life. He is strong to confront the mighty tribulations and sufferings which are the heritage of our race. He is strong when heart and flesh fail. He is strong to battle with the vices and passions of society, no matter however rampant and invincible those vices and passions may seem. He is strong to strike a blow for the emancipation of classes and peoples crushed beneath ancestral sins and superstitions. Where other men are cowards, where they yield at once to the assailing temptation, or acquiesce with sullen and despairing soul in sorrow and death, there the man of faith is confident and invincible.

Professor Seeley speaks of "that exaggeration of supernaturalism which crushes the present life under

the weight of an overwhelming future.”¹ But we might just as well speak of vegetation being crushed under that exaggeration of luminosity—the sun. Think of the sun’s mass, over 700 times that of all the planets put together; think of its diameter, 860,000 miles; think of its awful heat and brilliance! But the solar exaggeration is no burden to the daisy; it does not break the slender stem of the waving corn; it does not crush the bluebell, the lily, or the rose. So far from suffering from the exaggeration of the central orb, the flowers are indebted to it for all that they are; it moulds them, it infuses their fragrance, it paints them as no painter on earth can colour, it brings them to a dream-like perfection. “Verily, I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. So is it with the supernatural in the kingdom of souls: the present life is not afflicted by the weight of an overwhelming future; the supernatural does not crush us; it cherishes us, stimulates us, beautifies us, ripens us into the fulness of being.

II

The age in which we live is one in which we may expect eminent character. “In that day,” when the fulness of time was come, character was to attain its noblest and best. Whilst religious faith always and

¹ *Natural Religion*, Pref. vii.

everywhere elicits the energies of men, the faith of Christ is calculated in an extraordinary degree to excite their moral valour and efficiency. Intellectual power has perhaps been apportioned to successive ages in fairly equal measure, but this latest dispensation is distinguished by special religious grace and power. "There were giants in those days." The physical giants came in the morning of time, the moral giants tower and shine in the last age.

1. In Christ we have *the most exalted conception of God*. It is a favourite theory with some thinkers that the god of any people is simply and exactly a reflection of its own character. "I was forced to acknowledge that the personal Deity might, after all, be nothing but a mirage—a magnificent image of humanity—or, as I expressed it, a Brocken spectre, projected by the human consciousness upon the mists of the unknown. . . . That the master races of the world, the modern Europeans, should have embraced and evolved the purest and highest religion, appeared to me natural. My metaphor of the Brocken spectre covered this fact; for a giant creates a more splendid phantom than a dwarf."¹ But surely the Jehovah of Sinai was no reflection of the character of the horde of slaves who encamped at the mountain base. If their God had been a reflection of their own spirit in the sky, He would

¹ *Life of J. A. Symonds*, vol. ii. 115.

have been idle, sensual, bloody, as were the deities of pagan peoples. It is clear that the Hebrew conception of God was infinitely above them in purity and beauty. And just as they were faithful to their great ideal of the true and living God they were possessed by a passion for righteousness. Everything that was noble in Israel sprang out of their purer vision of God ; it was their glory and strength. " Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches : but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth : for in these things I delight, saith the Lord " (Jer. ix. 23, 24). Tyre easily eclipsed Israel in commercial wealth and influence ; Egypt was more famous for its science ; Assyria overshadowed them with its palaces and temples ; Greece outshone them in art and philosophy ; Rome attained far greater military might and dominion ; but Israel gained a loftier conception of God : they grasped the fact of His eternal truth and justice and purity, and it was this apprehension of the moral perfection of Jehovah that gave the Jewish nation coherence, tenacity, heroism ; that made them strong to resist mighty corruptions, to sustain unexampled sorrows, to offer the costliest sacrifices in the cause of righteousness. After all their infidelities and failures, the national

history of Israel is a splendid commentary on the words of one of their great prophets: "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits."

Yet in Christ we have a more perfect vision of God, and a more intimate fellowship with Him than any granted to the Jew. This is the larger teaching of the text. The house of David in Christ became like God, as the Angel of Jehovah. Christ brought the final revelation of God. He declared the justice, the righteousness, the fatherhood of God with a power and fulness altogether new. He brought God near to us. Dr. Duncan says: "It is the great glory of God's revelation that it has changed our abstracts into concretes." And this is specially true in regard to the Deity. The incarnation has made the Eternal, in all the glory of His holiness and love, and in all the reality and perfection of His government, appreciable to the human consciousness and heart.

If the Jewish conception of God inspired that people with a strength that has enabled them to survive Egypt, Assyria, Greece, and Rome, how much more inspired should we be to sustain the strife and peril of existence who see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! Beware of the insidious agnosticism of our day. When men cease to believe in God, they are incapable of the highest courage. They are cowards in the face of what they call necessity, fatality, doom. Having lost faith in a

faithful Creator, in a righteous Ruler, in a strong and loving Redeemer, they are weak to struggle with the severities of life and death. Faith in God makes a strong nation ; it makes a strong Church ; it makes a strong soul. We are all heroes whilst we triumph : "The best of all is, God is with us."

2. In Christ we have *the noblest ideal of humanity*. The greatest benefactors of the race are those who have given it a lofty conception of itself, and Christ has done this in a unique degree. Amiel says : "Great men are the true men, the men in whom Nature has succeeded. They are not extraordinary—they are in the true order. It is the other species of men who are not what they ought to be." But who has made this manifest as Christ has done? He stands before us in all His majesty and purity and love as "the proper man." What He was is precisely what all men ought to be. Weakness, meanness, sinfulness, and misery, are the characteristics of abnormal humanity. Greatness and grace characterize the true humanity. The greatest man is the truest man. David is quoted in the text as the hero of the Old Testament ; but how much more glorious is the Hero of the New? It is sometimes objected that Christ has not glorified the masculine and the heroic, that He illustrated and sanctioned only the amiable type; certain critics tell us that they prefer the healthy, vigorous Old Testament hero to the sentimental Hero of the Gospel. They like

the Spartan, or the Stoic, better than the Saviour. But in truth the courage of Christ was the supreme expression of the highest type of courage. The courage that braves sin, and that strives unto blood resisting sin in any of its myriad forms, is far more sublime than any prowess of the field of battle. And here is the incomparable glory of Jesus Christ: He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, that He might condemn sin and establish in the earth an everlasting righteousness.

Let not the fact of Christ's tenderness hide from us the greatness of His strength. A certain delicacy of nature, a wonderful softness and sweetness, a melting pity and grace, are often found in lion-hearted men. Luther was full of affection. Think of Cromwell watching by his daughter. "Kiss me, Hardy," said the dying Nelson. Garibaldi was tender as a woman. Gordon was deeply affectionate, fond of little children, full of the spirit of sympathy and sacrifice. And this mingling of strength and sweetness finds its supreme illustration in Jesus Christ. David was a man of deep feeling, of gushing tears of endearments, of immense pathos, and yet his daring and strength made him the ideal hero of Israel. But this blessing of power and grace came to its highest in David's greater Son. The Roman soldiers who buffeted our Lord knew nothing of the infinite resolution, constancy, and valour of their

Victim. Replying to one who contended that Jesus was effeminate, Wendell Phillips said : " You speculate as to whether Jesus was a masculine character. Look at the men who have learned of Him most closely—at Paul, and Luther, and Wesley. Were they effeminate? Yet the disciple is but a faint reflection of his Master. The character from which came the force which has been doing battle ever since with wrong, and falsehood, and error, was nothing less than masculine; sentiment is the toughest thing in the world—nothing else is iron." Christ has given the world a new conception of courage; He illustrated it in a sphere in which it means infinitely more than on fields of adventure or conflict, and He gave an illustration of it which will never be eclipsed. The endurance, the strength, and the tenacity of the soul were revealed in Christ once for all.

3. In the gift of the Spirit we have *the largest measure of moral force*. Science tells us that there is always the same amount of force in the world; it may be more or less demonstrated, but the sum total of material energy never varies. It is palpable, however, that the amount of spiritual energy in the world has varied immensely. And it is the grand characteristic of this later age that God has given us, in extraordinary degree, that spiritual energy by which men realize all lofty ideals of character, of nationality, of civilization. What was the grand

lesson of Pentecost? Why, this very text of ours found glorious fulfilment on that memorable day. At Pentecost, out of timid, vacillating, obscure tax collectors and fishermen arose the majestic apostles, whose mighty work has changed the face of the world. They were endowed with a divine, conquering energy, which enabled them to endure unexampled sacrifices and martyrdoms, to pull down strongholds, and to build the City of God at the very gates of hell. That same Spirit is with us—the lifting power, the transforming power, the perfecting power. And if the Hebrew attained such moral eminence and mastery, how glorious in holiness should we be when the Spirit, given in His fulness, worketh in us mightily!

Ever since Jesus Christ came great souls have been common. Every Church has had its princes of God; every village, its Elijahs; every generation, its noble army of martyrs, its “goodly apostolic band.” It is true that these have not always been visible to the carnal eye; there has been nothing dramatic or historic; the deeds have seemed pottering, the lives dull, the struggles small; but God has seen there the loftiest faith, the most determined bravery, the most magnificent triumphs, the most renowned heroes; unwritten Iliads known to God only, but infinitely more majestic and moving than the dreams of poets. We judge men by circumstance, and think them commonplace because their circum-

stances are. But Heaven judges the soul, and finds illustrious heroes in peasants, as the open-eyed scientist can see in mountain mosses the gigantic or gorgeous vegetation of sunnier lands.

It may be said that there is really very little true strength and greatness in many Christian lives. But it is our fault if this is the case. Gardeners usually seek to bring their trees to the fullest perfection and glory, but one of the peculiar features of Japanese horticulture is the production of dwarf trees. In flowerpots they grow veritable *simulacra* of the giants of the forest. They are no mere plants, but true trees, some of them a century old, yet attaining a height of only two or three feet. All the features of a full-grown tree are there, and they appear just like a forest tree would if looked at through the wrong end of an opera glass. The gardener takes infinite pains to grow these miniature trees. They are raised from seed, and when only a few inches high the repressive training begins. Not a day passes but the gardener has something to do with his charge by way of starving and crippling them. In order to hinder their growth, the trees are transplanted to pots which do not contain enough soil to nourish their branches. If any buds appear, they are nipped. As the result of this starvation and spoliation the tree puts forth no new buds, and remains a dwarf the whole of its life. What a picture of the way in which we treat our nobler life!

We are ever starving and limiting it. As it puts forth its buds and blossoms we pluck them. If we only did half as much to foster our best life as we do to restrict it, we should not be lacking as we are in grand experience and features, but share the massive grandeur of the trees of Lebanon. To be weak and poor now is the sign of neglect, unbelief, guilt. We must develop every power of our nature—body, soul, and spirit. There ought not to be a “weak one in all our tribes,”—“every one wearing the likeness of a king.”

SPIRITUALITY AND CIVILIZATION

“ God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”—1 *Tim.* vi. 17.

IX

SPIRITUALITY AND CIVILIZATION

IN a time of abounding wealth, of leisure and opportunity, of manifold luxury and fashion, novelty and pleasure, it is of the first importance that we understand our relation to the opulent civilization which marks our age.

I

Let us then observe that *the Christian life is a comprehensive and catholic life*. The Apostle frankly recognises this: "God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." God gives largely, and the truest life exults in all His gifts. The Christian is free to enter into all possible relations with the world: seeing everything, using everything, enjoying everything. It is not the genius of our spiritual faith to narrow the earthly life, but to make it as wide as possible. We are to cultivate a genuine interest in all phenomena, in all human life, in all the affairs of society, in all knowledge, invention, and achievement; we are

to feel the glow, to taste the sweetness, to realize the treasure of a many-sided life, of a manifold universe. Some teachers maintain that it is the highest wisdom to narrow life as much as possible, to bring into it as few things and interests as possible, to reduce it to as few sensations as possible. Schopenhauer has a passage in which he boldly contends for this: "Limitation always makes for happiness. We are happy in proportion as our range of vision, our sphere of work, our points of contact with the world are restricted and circumscribed. We are more likely to feel worried and anxious if these limits are wide; for it means that our cares, desires and terrors are increased and intensified." And he goes on to add that the reason why the later part of a man's life is less happy than the first part is: "As the years wear on, the horizon of our aims and our points of contact with the world become more extended. In childhood our horizon is limited to the narrowest sphere about us," and then with manhood and age there is a widening of the view which means increase of care and sorrow. Even in the affairs of the intellect, limitation is necessary, if we are to be happy. For the less the will is excited, the less we suffer. To limit the sphere of outward activity is to relieve the will of external stimulus; to limit the sphere of our intellectual effort is to relieve the will of internal sources of excitement. So, then, "limitation" is the great word of pessimism. If you wish to be happy,

or to come as near to that state as possible, your circumstances cannot be too simple, or too restricted.

Now it is easy to understand all this when a man holds the pessimistic philosophy. If life is an evil, the less of it the better, and the best of all when there is none at all ; if the increase of sensation implies necessarily an increase of suffering, the less stimulation the better, for inertia and insensibility constitute the golden goal ; if there is nothing in the sky but clouds without water, erratic thunderbolts, wandering stars, a sun that is darkness and a moon that is blood, the narrower the horizon the better. But I venture to say that this is exactly contrary to the genius of the Christian faith. The great teaching here is, that expansion makes for happiness ; that every added sensation is gain ; that the wider the horizon the better. Our religion has much to say about limitation, but not limitation for Schopenhauer's reasons, or on his lines. "God giveth us richly all things to enjoy." Christ came "that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly." We live the most truly when we see most, feel most, enjoy most the riches and glories of the world ; the vast possibilities of nature and life. The attempt to limit life implies a profound disbelief in it, and that scepticism is not ours.

The world is accustomed to regard spiritually-minded men as specially narrow, as fanatically morbid and exclusive. Let us not be misunderstood.

We do not attempt to put limits to science, as positivism does. We hail every new star, element, or law that our scientists discover. We do not attempt to put limits to the sensations and stimulations of life on account of an alleged viciousness of things, as pessimism does. We do not attempt to put limits to the interests, relations and pleasures of life, believing that these are naturally false and corrupting, as ecclesiastical asceticism does. It is no aim of ours to reduce human life to a minimum. We are free to enjoy the land in its length and breadth. We cannot look at the glorious universe without feeling that God meant us richly to enjoy, and we do enjoy all the pleasures of knowledge, imagination and emotion ; all science, literature, and art ; all the wealth of nature ; all the entertainments of society ; all the riches of the richest civilization. We do not relegate ourselves to a corner, we revolve in a sky ; we do not paddle on a pool, we sail on the sea. We are as broad as nature ; all her pipes are in our organ, all her strings are in our harp.

All Christians, however, are not as broad as their creed. The old puritans forbad many legitimate things because those things had become so inextricably intertwined with what was evil, and this has given to many of their successors a traditional narrowness and suspiciousness, even when the reason for prohibition has ceased. They suspect science ; they are uneasy about music, pictures, and dress ; they

are severe upon amusements ; they shrink from the secular and natural ; they think life safer as it is poorer. John Bunyan turned a woman out of his church because she wore a silk dress ; John Wesley tells us that he no more dare affect a fine style of writing than wear a fine coat ; Angelico painted only sacred subjects ; Miss Havergal permitted herself only sacred music. Now we need to watch this kind of exclusiveness. We must be prepared to give good reasons for it in the exceptional cases in which it is exercised, or it may easily discredit us in the sight of rational men. All things are ours, things present and things to come.

II

But the catholic life can be realized only through the limitations laid down in the context: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy ; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Thus the context warns the rich not to be arrogant and sordid ; it urges that their chief thought should not be sensuousness, but godliness ; that they live nobly ; that they exercise renunciations ; that

they share their advantages with the sons and daughters of disadvantage. Self-suppression, self-limitation, self-sacrifice, are declared to be the conditions of keen and catholic enjoyment; if you wish richly to enjoy all things, you can do so only through godliness, righteousness, and sacrifice. All things are ours, and to enjoy them we must hold them as from God; we must subordinate them to our moral culture; we must sacrifice them for our neighbour.

1. Let us note how this applies to the *physical life*. Nothing is more common than the notion that a spiritual faith does injustice to our animal nature, and discourages us in relation to the whole range of carnal pleasure. Some philosophers to-day plead passionately for the rights of the physical, sensual, emotional nature. They say that "if human life is to continue, we must cherish the coarse as well as the fine, the root as well as the top and flower." Men must be encouraged to eat and drink; they must be taught to toss off the cup of life with gusto. The Greeks believed in animal indulgence; they reduced sensual pleasure to a science; and we are greatly the losers by dropping the sensuous philosophy of the Greek. Christianity has injured us here. Its doctrine of purity weakens us by excessive modesty; we are losing stamina in consequence of the austere ethics for which Christianity is responsible. We are cultivating the delicate flower of

character, the fine blossoms of mind and spirit, and neglecting the roots in the soil of flesh and blood. We have too much of St. John, and too little of Shakespeare. And so, whilst Christian teachers give exaggerated attention to the white flower at the top, these naturalistic writers, faithful souls that they are, industriously supply the roots with literary manure.

But in truth it is only through the discipline of our corporeal life, such a discipline as the text suggests, that we can enjoy the fulness of the possibilities of our physique. Our faith does nothing to stimulate our passions and appetites ; that we acknowledge : but they need no encouragement. It is good for our children to eat, to play, to sleep, but there is no need to persuade them to do themselves full justice at the table, to give their best attention to games, or to lie in bed a little longer. There is no necessity. Some things take care of themselves, and the clamorous body, weighted with passion, is one of those things ; it will have its full share. What we need to promote is the high thought, the spiritual sympathy, the unselfish temper which restrains and governs the lower self. Says one of these pleaders for the rights of flesh and blood : "Our instincts and impulses were not given us by Heaven in order that we might disobey them." No, indeed ; they were given us that we might rule them and sanctify them by the higher law ; and it is only by godliness, righteous-

ness, and renunciation that we realize the glorious possibilities of our incarnation. There is a very remarkable passage in one of Godwin's letters to his daughter, in which the cynical old man confesses from a strange standpoint the efficacy of self-denial: "It is a refinement in voluptuousness to submit to voluntary privations. I always thought St. Paul's rule, that we should die daily, an exquisite epicurean maxim. The practice of it would give to life a double relish." The pagan could discern the virtue of self-denial, it gave life a double relish. If you wish keenly, vividly to realize the body—interrupt, limit, deny, sanctify its gratifications. Moral loftiness, purity and mastery give the last piquancy to the world of sensation. If you would know all that appetite means, put the puritan into the sybarite. Without godliness, abstinence, and high-thinking, the pleasures of sense are gross and brutal, and they perish in the using.

In this age we need to stand up for godliness, temperance, and sacrifice. It is an age of wealth, of teeming plenty, of leisure; an age full of solicitations to sensual excitement, the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh are being ingeniously stimulated; and the faithful testimony of the puritan is essential and precious. If our generation is richly to enjoy all things and to keep them, it will be because it is spiritual, righteous, and unselfish.

2. Let us note how the higher law applies to

wealth, fashion, and luxury. Our spiritual faith does not condemn the marvellous riches of modern civilization. It is true that the Old Testament contains some severe criticisms upon national wealth, splendour, and luxury; and Renan contends that the prophets held to a patriarchal simplicity, that they did not believe in organization and civilization, that they thought a pious condition of things incompatible with political life and splendour. But to hold such a view is to misread the prophets. When Ezekiel takes up a lamentation for Tyre, and gives a large and pathetic view of its beauty, greatness, and riches, of its wonderful commerce, power, and colonization, it is not to condemn these things as being essentially and necessarily unlawful and injurious. It was the pride, the scepticism, the untruthfulness and violence which defiled the merchandise and splendour of Tyre against which Ezekiel protested. "Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee : it shall devour thee ; and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth, in the sight of all them that behold thee." In his twenty-seventh chapter Ezekiel paints with a sympathetic pencil the multitudinous political and commercial splendours of Tyre ; he regards the fact that it was replenished and made very glorious in the midst of the seas as a splendid privilege, and not as a curse.

The real view of the subject held by the prophets is expressed also by Isaiah in many passages. "The kings of the earth shall bring their glory and their honour into it." Babylon with all her gold and glory, her precious stones and spices, her pleasant pictures and music, is not finally to be swallowed in the abyss; Zion is to purge and sanctify Babylon, and to make of her a city of God, whose walls are carbuncles, whose windows are agates, and all whose borders are pleasant stones. It is perfectly untrue to say that the prophets regarded an opulent civilization as essentially incompatible with a pious condition of things. And the same holds good of the apostles. Paul, in our text, has nothing to say against the "rich in this world"; and Peter, speaking critically of the wearing of gold and the plaiting of the hair, is influenced only by the present distress. The apostles regarded the wealth and magnificence of the classic world as things given by God richly to be enjoyed, and only awaiting the consecrating touch of a spiritual faith, the uplifting influence of moral restraint.

But if these gifts of time and sense are to be truly and abidingly enjoyed, it will be because the conditions laid down in our text are duly observed. Greatness must be made humble in the presence of God; pride must be chastened by the recollection that all is freely given of God; righteousness must assert itself in all spheres; self-denial must supply a

needful tonic ; disinterestedness must limit personal indulgence. Flowers are delightful things, yet you may easily have them too thick and fast. In the South of France they grow acres of the sweetest and most glorious blooms—cassia, jasmine, tuberose, violets, verbenas, jonquils, and orange-blossom. These blooms are bought up by the distillers, and it is a strange fact that when the fragrant things are gathered into mounds they occasion serious complaints in those who have to handle them ; the scent produces an exasperated and exasperating form of hay-fever, the pollen of the flowers acts as a poison to the nervous system, and hardly a season passes without some orange-blossom picker succumbing to syncope. Flowers are delightful when sprinkled with a wise economy, their loveliness having plenty of background, their scent delicately haunting the air ; but gather them into heaps and they poison, you die in aromatic pain. And so with the rich and splendid and exquisite things of our civilization—they are precious and delightful if not overcrowded ; they must have intervals, margins, interspaces—backgrounds of high thinking, noble work, social sympathy, humble duty, divine worship, loving sacrifice ; the moral, the humane, the spiritual must have full recognition, or the flowers of our civilization will poison and destroy us.

It is our special duty in this wonderful age to enforce the higher law of Christian life and service.

Let us clearly and fully recognise the legitimacy of the affluence of the times. Let us not proscribe these things of taste and splendour, but insist that they shall be conditioned by godliness, righteousness, and disinterestedness. We have witnessed a great outburst of material riches, of imperial power, of social felicity, of intellectual and artistic life, and this outburst of worldly gifts calls for a fresh outburst of spiritual truth and power and grace to sustain the imperilled balance. These spiritual truths, in the face of unparalleled material prosperity, we must passionately maintain.

3. Finally, a word as to the bearing of our text upon our *intellectual, æsthetic, and sentimental life*. Here, once again, we recognise that God "giveth us all things richly to enjoy." Christianity smiles upon the whole width and wealth of the intellectual world—science, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, and literature. Everything in which the understanding, the imagination, and the emotions can delight are ours. Our faith does not exclude these things; we are as free to appreciate the highest culture and the fulness of culture as any ancient or modern pagan.

But whilst Christianity sanctions this glowing and delightful universe, it insists upon the supremacy of the spiritual and ethical elements. It declares that we can truly and permanently possess and enjoy only whilst we are godly, holy, and helpful. With appre-

ciation of the gift must go the love of the Giver ; with the admiration of beauty must go the beauty of holiness ; with the relish of pleasure must go the power of sacrifice. And this faith is being fully vindicated in our day. Thousands of cultured men are feeling the vanity of knowledge ; they are weary of pipes and lutes and strings ; they are sick of splendour ; they have a terrible sense of satiety in picture-galleries, museums, and theatres. What do they want ? They want a baptism of the Spirit. They want more of the sense of the living God ; more sympathy with the Lord Jesus Christ ; a more vivid conception of the glory of righteousness ; a richer gift of the power of unselfishness ; and then pictures, poetries, decorations, robes, symphonies, spectacles, and feasts would fill them with a delight to which hitherto they have been strangers. Self-mastery, self-limitation, self-sacrifice are essential if we are to taste the sweetness of things. There is no pure joy, no lasting satisfaction in the æsthetic world except the deepest life is divine.

Scoffers may scorn the severity and suspiciousness of the puritan touching the fine arts, but the puritan has much to say for himself. In passing from Mentone into Italy the custom-house officers are most particular to take from travellers any bouquet of flowers they may have, any bunch of grapes, an orange, or even an innocent rose-bud in the button-hole is ruthlessly taken away. This at first sight

appears absurd, but when you understand that it is an attempt to keep out of Italy the minute vermin which have wasted the vineyards of France, you see the reasonableness of the precaution. The puritan proscribed the legal and the lovely not because of some blind fanaticism, but out of jealousy for the highest truths and principles. He saw in dress, amusements, accomplishments, luxuries, as these existed in his day, the germs of infection, the microbes of evil, and excluded them as the Italian officers do the golden apple, the purple cluster, the sweet poesy, the blushing rosebud, however innocent these may be in themselves. And there is every reason that we should be equally sensitive to-day. A godless, selfish culture accompanied the decadence of Greece, and Rome, and Italy; and the same sensuous, selfish culture appears now to be sapping the strength and dimming the glory of France. It is for us to scrutinize all culture, and to see that it does not smuggle into our national life the subtle, pestilent microbes which destroy civilization.

THE SPLENDID ISOLATION

“ I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”—*St. John* xvii. 15.

X

THE SPLENDID ISOLATION

THE evil that is in the world. It is everywhere —narrowing, blinding, defiling, destroying. How are we to be kept in a world like this? How is the Redeemer's prayer to be answered in the disciple's safety? Usually when we reflect on this matter, we conclude that God saves His children by exercising over them a supernatural guardianship, that He entrusts them to a celestial police, that they are sustained by angels' hands lest they dash their foot against a stone. But this is an altogether insufficient explanation. God saves His people from within rather than from without; and it is to this interior divine action that we must look for our salvation. He makes us invincible through the soul.

I

God protects His people from the evil that is in the world by giving to them *an instinct of peril*.

Volumes have been written upon the marvellously

keen sense of danger with which many of the inferior animals are endowed. But even before we come to animals, vegetable life sometimes displays a curious appreciation of peril and a manifest shrinking from it. In the Guiana forest, when a branch dies and begins to decay, the sensitive aërial roots of the orchid seem to appreciate what is about to happen and loose their hold. The sensitive points turn away in apparent disgust, the whole plant shrinks from what is poisonous to it, and will rather allow itself to fall into the midst of the thicket below than run the risk of further contamination ; something like a prophetic instinct works in the wonderful flower, making it strangely alive to the danger of the situation. Birds, insects and animals generally have this prescient sense in a surprising degree of perfection. It is said that the butterflies of India migrate to escape the monsoon. Every year for one day, or two days at the most, in the beginning of June, all the butterflies of a certain species are seized with a northward tendency. All day long they drift past, but their direction never changes. The natives say that three days after the butterflies pass, the monsoon will break. They appear to have a meteorological sense which gives them intimation of low-pressure areas, and that warns them to get up and haste away. When the dreadful catastrophe occurred some years ago in the island of Ischia, prognostications of the coming earthquake were given by various animals ;

some time before the shocks were felt, creatures of all kinds were agitated in a wonderful way. It seems as though God had given even to inferior life a prophetic sense ; it is not delivered to sudden destruction. Everything and every creature gets mysterious warning—a chance to hide itself in a cleft of the rock. In this exquisite admonitory instinct lies the salvation of the irrational world, for to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Now God gives to all sincere men a similar instinct for moral peril—"a sensibility of sin, a pain to feel it near." You are not drawn to a certain man, you have vague prepossessions against him on moral grounds ; you do not exactly know why you shrink from him, but the idiom and atmosphere of the man do not satisfy your instinctive sense. Now that ought to be quite enough for you, even when you are unable to give clear reasons to yourself for your antipathy. God has made you a "discerner of spirits," and you must respect the subtle warning. You read a certain book, and eventually lay it down with a feeling of dislike. When people ask you for the grounds of your dislike, you are a bit at a loss for an answer : you cannot clearly argue the thing out or justify in language your unfavourable judgment, although your soul revolts. Do not distress yourself because you cannot satisfy the critics. You know that the reading of the book stained the whiteness of your soul, that it left ugly images

in your imagination, that it left a nasty taste in your mouth ; and this amply justifies you in rejecting such literature. Or, you are persuaded to go to some place of entertainment ; you did not wish to go, but these are catholic days, and so you consented. Your friends ask, How did you like it ? You reply, Not at all. Then they wish to know why you disapprove. What did you see, what did you hear, that you object to ? Now there was not anything definite in what you saw that you can describe, not anything in what you heard that you can quote, and therefore they charge you with being unreasonable. Not at all unreasonable ; you are not saved by your ability to understand, but by delicate powers of perception and judgment that defy analysis and explanation. The orchid can give no explanation of its shrinking from the tainted branch ; the butterfly does not understand its impulse to the northward flight ; the animal cannot explain to itself the nervousness which presages the earthquake ;—but they are perfectly right in their alarm and action. And so are you.

A lady in the Bureau of Engraving at Washington told me that when first appointed to her post she was miserably anxious lest she should permit any spurious bank-note to pass undetected ; most painfully did she scrutinise numbers, signs, and signatures, until she was pretty nearly consumed by solicitude. At length a senior officer comforted her

by saying : " Do not worry. Be careful ; and when you have done that be tranquil, for the first time you touch bad paper you will feel a shiver as though you received a cold shower-bath." And it is much the same in our moral life : the soul also has a sensibility by which we detect the spurious, the unclean, and the dangerous. Ever be watchful and cautious : life has no place for presumption. Scrutinise signs and signatures, but remember at last that you must know the sinister man, the spotted book, the equivocal entertainment, much as that official knows the counterfeit paper—by a subtle touch which defies comprehension. A man's brain is not the wisest part of him : he has instincts and perceptions far more profound and infallible than his blundering logic or prudential utilitarianism. Men are not saved by their cleverness ; that usually brings them into trouble : they are safeguarded by their sensibility. The bloom on a peach, the naturalist tells us, is of the very first consequence to its life and perpetuation ; and the best thing about any of us men and women is the fine bloom on our mind, our conscience, our feeling,—it is more effectual for our salvation than walls of granite or gates of brass.

I say to the young people, Take care of the delicacy of the mind ; retain the power to blush ; respect the alarm and shrinking of the soul on the faintest suspicion of evil. Cynical people call you "green." Thank God that you are that colour : mind

that you keep it ; it is infinitely better than the sear and yellow leaf of a wasted life. A keen sense of impending danger is the munition of rocks, and you preserve that sense only by a swift and delicate obedience to its admonitions. Live so purely, so resolutely for your Master, that your whole moral nature shall continue

Quick as the apple of an eye
The slightest touch of sin to feel.

II

God protects His people through *the energy of health.*

Sound organic health is the prime antiseptic. Thinking superficially, we conclude that the best protection of threatened things and creatures is a stout barricade, a clever precaution, a resourceful diplomacy ; but in truth there is no defence that will compare with inward vigour, with the glow of health, with the fire, the force, the fulness of life. We readily see the precariousness of weak things. When a blight settles on one of our landscapes, it plays havoc with the choice flowers of our gardens, the roses are filthy with consuming parasites ; and yet the dog-rose in the hedge, the wild flower in the meadow are free from the blighting vermin. Tempests violent enough to destroy all cultivated plants frequently spare those of spontaneous growth.

A naturalist relates that he has often seen in Northern Italy vineyards, maizefields, mulberry and fruit trees completely stripped of their foliage by hail, whilst the forest trees scattered through the meadows, and the shrubs and brambles which spring up by the wayside, passed through the ordeal with scarcely the loss of a leaf. How is this? Why should the domestic growths suffer so severely whilst wild vegetation survives in purity and beauty? The fact is, the domesticated flowers and trees are coddled into imbecility. Cared for by glass, mats, sheltering walls, flower-pots and hedges, the gardener lets down their native vigour, and the enfeebled things immediately fall victims to the blight and hail; but the rose of the wayside and the pine upon the hill are stout of fibre, they are full of sap, and they laugh at the storm and the caterpillar. The same thing is true in our physical life. If there is a whiff of an epidemic in the air delicate people suffer and succumb, whilst men full of vitality continue safe in the centre of the most appalling sanitary conditions. Fever germs, microbes, bacilli give them no anxiety; a thousand fall by their side, and ten thousand at their right hand, but the pestilence comes not nigh them. People say of these, "Yes, they have a charmed life." The fact is, all life is charmed when you have enough of it. We are not kept free from deadly infections by disinfectants, fumigations, and quarantines, but by the force of the heart, the rich-

ness of the blood, the lustre of the eye, and the rose upon the cheek. If you wish to be insured against the plague, keep up your health ; if you fear to die, see to it that you are full of life.

Now all this is particularly true in relation to the children of God : they are safe from within ; they are invulnerable in proportion to the sincerity, the depth, and the fulness of their spiritual life. The safety of the Lord Jesus was thus assured. His was not a sheltered life, He was tempted in all points like as we are. But He was secure in the power of holiness. " Hereafter I will not talk much with you : for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." He rested absolutely secure in the perfect purity and awful beauty of His character. And it was thus with the primitive Christians. They knew nothing of a cloistered virtue. They were strong in a whole-hearted devotion to their Master, in the vision of faith, in a pure conscience bearing them witness in the Holy Ghost, in an abounding love, in the joy of the Lord, in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ. They walked in the filthiest highways this world has known—the streets of Athens, Rome, Ephesus, Corinth—with raiment whiter than any fuller on earth could whiten ; and that raiment was kept white because it was transfigured from within. Thus the saints must be kept inviolate in the Babylon of to-day. None of us can be sheltered under glass, none must trust much in exterior,

artificial lines of defence. "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not : but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." The wall of fire between us and the wickedness of the age is the glow of health, and there is no other wall of fire.

A wise Christian will not unnecessarily expose himself to peril ; there is no justification for unwatchfulness and presumption ; yet let us not think too much about surroundings, neighbourhoods, and atmospheres. If we have reason to believe that God has fixed the bounds of our habitation, we need not be too sensitive about circumstances. A robust soul is safe anywhere. Alpine plants bloom in inaccessible places, in the chinks of savage rocks, amid eternal ice and snow, and they will grow equally well in your garden bathed in the influences of the gentle summer ; the gorgeous parrots of the Orient, whose home is in the everlasting sunshine and summer, will live and thrive in the woods of England all through snowy winters ; and the saintly soul is free of yet wider latitudes and more contrasted atmospheres. It would seem impossible to live in sceptical surroundings without peril to our faith, and yet thousands come into daily conflict with atheisms and blasphemies without sustaining hurt. It would seem impossible to live a spiritual life amid a sordid, selfish throng, and yet we doubt not that there are men on the Stock Exchange as unworldly as any saint that ever lived in a cloister.

It would seem impossible to work for six days of the week with coarse, foul-mouthed, drunken associates without suffering injury and having the garments spotted, but the fact is that thousands of good people thus live and toil, and come forth on Saturday night good as gold and white as snow. God has a wonderful way of keeping things immaculate amid intense and pervasive abominations. Sweet flowers spring in pestilential marshes. Guano has been found to contain many beautiful forms of diatoms, which have lost none of their perfection of structure or exquisite loveliness or heavenly purity, despite the strange vicissitudes they have sustained. And those microscopic creatures you take from the mud of slimy pools are pure and radiant as though they had been born in the sun, cradled in the rainbow, and baptized in the silvery dew of the morning. Can God keep these, and will He fail to preserve His faithful children? I tell you, nay; for if you fill your mind with truth, your imagination with beauty, your heart with love, your hands with noble work, if you take fresh drinks from the eternal fountain and renew your strength by waiting upon God ;— you shall keep your garments as white in Sodom as though you walked the golden streets of the new Jerusalem. Fear not the sin and sorcery of a wicked world. “He that is in you is more than he that is in the world,” and shortly the “Preserver of men” shall lift you out of this contagious

sphere, undebauched by its wickedness, unhurt by its plagues ; ye shall be "as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

III

Finally, God saves His people through *the power of faith*.

We are often reminded that life can only persist whilst it has a suitable environment. Plants die without certain gases, animals perish in a temperature either too hot or cold, the white race suffers deterioration in an equatorial climate ; the surroundings must be in harmony with the life, the life with the surroundings. Now this is equally true in regard to the soul. Just as bird, beast, or flower must be delicately adjusted to its circumstances, so the soul can live and flourish only in a congenial environment and atmosphere. 'Well,' it will be at once objected, 'but it has been already shown that our circumstances are often emphatically out of keeping with the health and life of the soul.' Let me say in answer to this, that the apparent environment of a believer is not always his real environment. To the carnal eye he is girded about with worldliness, unbelief, immorality ; but in fact his faith creates his real environment—he does not live in the world in which he appears to live. Faith secures the right conditions, reveals the

right ideals, pours around the soul the heavenly influences in which alone it can live and thrive. The saint walks by faith, not by sight. Look at Stephen. He is surrounded by an infuriated multitude. One would say that he saw only a persecuting mob, that he heard only voices of blasphemy. Hearken : "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." To the carnal eye John at Patmos had for environment a gloomy island, a solitary sea, a few unfriendly soldiers; but John knew little of all this, for a celestial universe unfolded about him, and the isle was filled with strange music, peopled with angelic shapes, it blossomed with amaranth and unwithering roses. To the carnal eye John Bunyan dwelt within the narrow walls of Bedford gaol, with only coarse and painful things to contemplate and suffer; but his spiritual imagination made him live in a country where it was summer the year round, he dwelt in the Palace Beautiful, climbed the hill Beulah, heard golden trumpets, saw the city of gem and glass lighted with the glory of God. To the carnal eye Charles Wesley at Devizes was the centre of a tumultuous and threatening rabble; but listen to the hymn he and his followers triumphantly sang, and you understand that his environment was another than that :—

Lo ! to faith's enlightened sight
All the mountain flames with light ;

Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,
Circling us with hosts of fire.

Thousands of God's people do not really live in the scenes in which they seem to live ; faith lifts them into the heavenlies ; they hear the angels sing, they walk amid flowers, they breathe the ampler air, they taste the powers of the world to come.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." When men awake to the greatest life, the things that once were full of interest and delight charm no longer. Milton never wished to go back to the rattle of the nursery after he had once put his lips to the golden trumpet of paradise ; Newton wanted no more hoop after he had once measured the majestic circle of the sun and followed in its march of light ; Wren cared no more to raise the kite of his boyhood after he had built in the sky the dome of St. Paul's ; and Columbus would sail no more paper boats after he had once seen from the deck of his ship a new world. Men in the greatness of their intellectual life forget the toys and trifles of childhood ; such things drop out and are remembered only with a smile. And thus it is in an emphatic sense with the spiritual. They have seen the most splendid patterns, they have been inspired with the most magnificent hopes, they have tasted the purest pleasures, they have set their hand to the grandest tasks, and illegitimate things become intolerable, whilst the legitimate things of time and sense fall

into just proportion and subordination. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Live thus, and "thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

“For every (each, R. V.) man shall bear his own burden.”

—*Gal.* vi. 4, 5.

XI

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

THE direct reference is to the burden of temptation, but the words of the Apostle allow a larger interpretation, and we may justly regard him as implying here the burden of personal responsibility. The text reminds us of the universality of responsibility. "Every man," "Each man." When we enter one of the great jewellery establishments of this metropolis, it seems as if the place were only very loosely superintended, and as if we could move about handling gold and gem with impunity; but, in fact, the most severe supervision is exercised, and the stranger does not touch one precious thing without being watched most severely. So in life, we handle the costliest treasures—time, health, culture, friendship, wealth, influence, and we seem at liberty to do as we please with these things, using and abusing them with impunity; but the eye of God is upon all His gifts, and every one shall give account of himself unto God.

The text reminds us also of the individuality of

responsibility. "His own burden." There is something singular and incommunicable in each individual lot. Our personality is unique. In days past the fittings of a watch were all made by hand, and so the various parts of any two watches were never exactly alike; if you took twenty Swiss watches to pieces and shuffled up their parts, you would spoil twenty watches; you could never out of the mass construct one that would go. But American watches are made automatically, all the parts of the watch are interchangeable, all wheels, pinions, springs, pivots are exactly alike, and, shuffle them as you may, you can at once put them together again and they go perfectly. Now, human beings are fashioned like Swiss watches; they present delicate and invincible variations. He who curiously fashioned us in the lower parts of the earth has imprinted upon us an inviolable individuality; if you could pick to pieces twenty men and mix their several faculties, you could never put them together again; they are not made automatically, they have been freely fashioned by Him whose personality contains the fulness of being. And then our surroundings are almost as peculiar as our personality. The circumstances of men seem much alike to a careless eye whilst really they are infinitely diverse. If this morning I could be lifted out of my environment into yours, and you could be lifted out of your environment into mine, we should both think that in changing situations we had

changed worlds. So we have differing constitutions, affinities, repulsions, callings, obligations, and experiences. And what the Apostle says here is, that we must bravely accept our individual responsibility. We must help others because we have a burden of our own, is the touching argument of the Apostle; but it is also implied that we must not shirk our personal burden.

Let us notice several ways by which the sense of individual responsibility may be injured, and the serious consequences of such injury.

I

See how the sense of responsibility is threatened by *the philosophy of our day*. A very prevalent current idea is that we are dominated by nature, by cosmic laws, by hereditary influence, and that really we have little power of determination, little reality of accountability. A while ago we sat on the cliff overlooking the sea, and far below we noticed a drain pipe discharging a filthy stream that fouled the ocean and stained all its shores. By our side was another stream rushing to the sea. It murmured through a lovely dell, the golden light glistened on its eddies, wallflowers made the banks beautiful and the air sweet, branches of white blossom bent overhead, and so the crystal brook went singing with the birds until it fell with music into the sea. Yes, say

the philosophers, human life is like that : sometimes it is a current diverted to a low level, and it flows through a drain pipe ; sometimes it is fortunate enough to be drawn into a pure and lofty channel, flowing out unsullied to the sea ; but it is always the channel, the circumstance, that determines the character. Much of our modern science and philosophy strives to show that we are, one way or other, the victims of necessity. A recent philosopher thus sums up what he considers to be the result of a great branch of modern science : "The first, and perhaps the greatest, lesson of heredity is that the individual man is much less the arbiter of his own destinies than his pride would have him believe." And one of the most popular of our novelists, after describing the miserable crime of an infinite villain, adds this fatal sophistry : "The blind leading that is seen here of passion by accident is seen everywhere that great tragedies are done. It is not the evil in man's heart more than the deep perfidy of circumstance that brings him to crime." "Passion by accident," "perfidy of circumstance" ; these are to explain the commission of great tragedies and to bear the chief weight of their guilt ! The teachings of this philosophy we must steadily resist. Let us not so identify ourselves with nature as to make her responsible for our conduct ; to do that would destroy us individually and nationally. The sense of necessity, of fatalism, has sapped the grandeur of

the East; the sense of freedom and independence makes the West living and sovereign. There are many burdens we can lay on nature, that is one of the great and beautiful lessons of science. The light succours us, the wind becomes our chariot, the lightning carries our message, steam triumphantly lifts our most gigantic load—all the laws and forces of the planet stand by us and lighten our task; but we have a mysterious burden that nature may not carry. Physical laws do not explain our character, our conduct, our experience, our graces and vices, our consciousness of innocence or guilt. There is something in us that there is not in nature. The stream of life is in the highest sense self-determining; so we often see the crystal stream emerge from the drain pipe, and the foul waters of hell leap from the midst of social sunlight and flowers. In the face of the strongest temptation to the contrary acknowledge your burden before God. If we exert aright our energy of will nature enters into league with us, and her richest outcome will be the noble men and women who knew how to use without abusing her.

II

Let us note how the sense of responsibility is *endangered by ecclesiasticism*. If revelation teaches any one doctrine with perfect clearness, it is that of our personal relation to God, our personal accountability

to God, and really everything in character and practical life seems to depend upon the full recognition of this fundamental truth. Weaken the sense of personal responsibility before God and you damage men every way. When the Church takes upon itself to see to the salvation of my soul, it has done its best to ruin me for time and for eternity. Just lately one of our statesmen called attention to "decaying nations." These decaying nations are Roman Catholic. Wherever that form of ecclesiasticism prevails, the nation withers. It is so in Europe, it is so in America, it is so wherever communities are wholly under Catholic government and influence.

What is the true explanation of this striking fact which at the moment arrests universal attention? It seems to us that the final explanation is this—the assumptions of the Roman Catholic Church injure, limit, and destroy the sense of personal responsibility. The Church does your thinking for you, and instructs you what to believe; it takes upon itself the burden of your sin; it makes up for your deficiencies by applying to you out of its treasury the merit of saints; in a word, it undertakes to see you through. This is the subtle temptation that lures many into Catholicism. They are crushed under the sense of personal responsibility, and taking refuge in the bosom of the Catholic Church, putting their burden on the priest, they find rest unto their soul. But what is the outcome of this damaged sense of re-

sponsibility and of the false peace that goes with it? The consequences are tragical and profound. The atmosphere presses upon us to the extent of some fifteen pounds to the square inch, so that an ordinary-sized man suffers the pressure of many tons. But we can easily be freed from this atmospheric burden; put under an air pump the weight of the air is soon completely gone, there is no pressure whatever—only breath and life go at the same time. So the Roman Church diminishes the pressure of responsibility, but by the same act paralyses and destroys civilization; destroying the sense of responsibility, it breaks the mainspring of individual and national power and progress.

Whatever ecclesiasticism assumes or promises, we must bravely bear our burden. We must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. No priest can relieve us of the burden of the understanding. We must for ourselves think out our creed. It is of no use for a student to copy the answers of his neighbour, even if those answers be correct. No use at all, worse than no use at all. He must for himself solve the intellectual problems submitted to him, and in attempting this his errors are more precious than the passive acceptance of infallible dictation. The Catholic says: What, is any tinker to shape a creed as he shapes a pot? The sufficient answer to which objection is, a tinker named John Bunyan saw more deeply into God's most Holy Book than any

Pope that ever sat in the papal chair. With God's Word in your hand and God's Spirit in your heart, you shall for yourself prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. No priest can relieve us of the burden of the conscience. For ourselves we must trust in the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world ; if we do that, we need no priest ; if we do not for ourselves trust in the Redeemer, no priest can help us an iota. No priest can relieve us of the burden of the will. Anatole France says : " An education which does not exercise the will is an education which depraves the soul." And the Church of Rome, teaching submissiveness and acquiescence in ecclesiastical authority, depraves the soul. The true teacher recognises the dignity of his pupil, the fact of his inalienable independence, and educates his will.

Our whole salvation must be worked out in personal thought, penitence, faith, service, and sacrifice. Let no one pray in your stead, give in your stead, read the Bible in your stead, sing in your stead, or work in your stead. If you seek great character, if you resolve to make your calling and election sure, you must prove the burden of responsibility, for out of the weight of responsibility comes the weight of glory.

III

Let us mark the sense of personal responsibility *as it is endangered by legislation*. In our day there is a strong tendency to put more and more responsibility upon the State, that is, to make the multitude responsible for the individual. We expect Government to protect us in life and limb, to educate us, to see to our health and reading and pleasure, to provide us with old age pensions. Now, it is not for me to say how far socialism and collectivism are good as against individualism, but be sure that if this political paternalism means any lessening of the sense of personal responsibility it is an evil. Mr. Alfred R. Wallace has a most instructive passage on the real evil of slavery. He says, speaking of a slave owner who treated his slaves well, that the slaves were as happy as children : they had no care and no wants, they were attended to in sickness and old age, amusements were provided for them, and they were better off than many a free man. Here slavery was seen under its most favourable aspect, "But," continues the traveller, "looking at it in this, its most favourable light, can we say that slavery is good or justifiable? Can it be right to keep a number of our fellow-creatures in a state of adult infancy—of unthinking childhood? It is the responsibility and self-dependence of manhood that

call forth the highest powers and energies of our race. It is the struggle for existence, the battle of life, which exercises the moral faculties and calls forth the latent sparks of genius" (*Travels on the Amazon*). The essential evil of the system of slavery is, then, that it destroys in the slave the sense of responsibility. It is quite true that socialism and slavery are systems far apart ; but if socialism should relieve us of the necessity to reflect, to watch, to provide, to strive, it will just so far act inimically as slavery does. The sense of personal right, responsibility, obligation, has made England, Germany, and America, and they would soon be unmade if any power or organization whatever were to assume our burden of citizenship.

So far from the State taking our burdens, we must regard the State as part of our burden. We are responsible for the Parish Council, the Municipality, the Empire. Do not attempt to say that you have nothing to do with public questions and interests. In a spirit of noble patriotism loyally bear your share of the burden of civic and national life. It is our solemn duty to think, to watch, to serve, to make sacrifices for the commonwealth ; to become guardians of the public sobriety, purity, and freedom. How utterly unworthy some are of the great inheritance they have received as Englishmen ! They take all, and then selfishly and cynically refuse to make the smallest patriotic return.

The burden of public life is ours, and we are cowards and criminals if we attempt to shirk it.

IV

Finally, note the sense of personal responsibility *as it is affected by business and domestic life*. There are many ways, subtle ways, in which we edge off our burdens upon shoulders seen and unseen. In our business life let us realize our obligation. We live in a day of companies and syndicates, of unions and co-operative societies, and there is danger lest we leave our responsibility with these. As workmen let each do his duty ; do not lose yourself in a crowd, but ever work as in the great Taskmaster's eye. In domestic life realize individual responsibility. Let the husband do this. In Italy you repeatedly see a man and woman walking side by side, the woman carrying on her head the burden, sometimes a burden like a grindstone. Do you say, Let us be thankful that we never see anything like that in England? There are other burdens than material burdens, burdens carried on a wearied mind, on a sore heart, and many a wife droops under a load in which her companion fails to take a fair share. Let the wife realize her responsibility. To-day many women are thrust into public life, they must trust to their own resources, they must look after themselves or go under, and this sense of re-

sponsibility gives them strength of character. Let the wife in the sheltered home, and with the helpful husband, take care that she does not suffer any enfeebling of character ; she, too, has immense delicate responsibilities which cannot be ignored without the most serious detriment. And let the children be ready to assume responsibility and look after themselves when the time comes. They are of little worth unless they do. They are made by responsibility. They must one of these days leap overboard, sink or swim ; we hope that they will swim, but any way they must take the great leap.

Respect your individuality. It is a good thing to recall that we stand alone, that we are insulated from all our fellows, that each of us stands out distinctly before God as if there were not another being on the planet. Realize this constantly. Do not confound yourself with other people, do not lean upon other people, stand on your feet. We saw an article the other day in which the writer insisted that roses ought to be grown on their own roots ; he said such roses were stronger and safer, and that they thus came to the utmost perfection of their splendid nature. It is the same with men. Keep on defining your individuality, hold personal fellowship with God, grow on your own roots, grow for eternity.

Realize your responsibility. Never attempt to limit it, or to escape it ; it is your glory, it alone distinguishes you from things and brutes

We may not put our burden on our brother, but we may lean on God. He knows us personally. He does not know the ocean only, but the drop ; not the Milky Way, but the star ; not the meadow, but the flower ; not the mass, but the atom ; not the million, but the man. He knows your name, your street, your number, your trade. He knows you, and knows you altogether. And He can bear your burden. It would crush your neighbour, but it will not crush Him. He can bear it easily as the Atlantic bears a bubble, easily as Mont Blanc a snowflake. Cast "all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

THE PRIMITIVE AND THE PERFECTED
MAN

“ And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden ; and there He put the man whom He had formed.”—*Gen.* ii. 8.

“ And I saw a new heaven and a new earth : for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away ; and there was no more sea.”—*Rev.* xxi. 1.

XII

THE PRIMITIVE AND THE PERFECTED MAN

SO Revelation opens with a paradise and closes with one. It is, indeed, a long sad journey from the first to the last ; ages of suffering and sorrow intervene ; we cross a wide wilderness full of griefs and graves. I wish to compare the two gardens, and to set forth some points of advantage in the final paradise ; to show how in several respects humanity gains by its long pilgrimage of sorrow. My sermon will be a sermon of suggestion only ; we see in a glass darkly, and all that we can expect to trace are a few outlines and shadows of the ultimate reality. You may be ready sometimes to ask me whether I am speaking of a celestial or a terrestrial paradise ; I am not sure of which. The Scriptures leave the great 'future in a golden mist, and we need not seek more exactly to define what it has pleased God to leave obscure, but I am always speaking of a paradise which will grow out of the present condition of things. And let no one be

impatient. It is a good thing sometimes to get wide horizons, to refresh our soul with glimpses of the vast and beautiful purposes of God.

I

We glance for a moment *at the two spheres of existence*. In all ages men have looked back sadly and lovingly to the lost paradise; but we may be comforted—a fairer, vaster sphere opens to us as the dwelling-place of regenerated humanity. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.” And we need not be staggered by this prophecy, for science delights to show that many heavens and many earths have already passed away. As the geological world was the rough draft, or a series of rough drafts, of this more beautiful and finished world on which we now gaze, so this present world is a dim foreshadowing of the ultimate spiritualized theatre of human life. There is much in nature to-day that mars its loveliness, that spoils its music; it is full of sad facts which sorely puzzle and distress reflective men; but we may confidently believe that in the ages to come these painful problems will be eliminated. “And there shall be no more sea.” What is the meaning of this? It is a metaphor which teaches that the dark, the wild, the cruel, the terrible, the savage, the dangerous and destruc-

tive organisms, elements and forces of nature shall be no more. As the monsters of the antediluvian ages vanished, so shall the dark and tragical things of our age cease from nature, and no longer perplex and distress the sons of God. To say that the city of the future is all gold and gem and glass is to say that the spirits of just men made perfect dwell in a universe which is also perfect—a universe purged from the spots and shadows of the present time. The “crooked serpent” was in the first paradise, that is, the sinister element has hitherto asserted itself in the workings of matter and life ; but we read of no “crooked serpent” in the ultimate paradise. Each successive age sends some dragon to the museum, until the golden age dawns when none shall hurt or destroy in all the holy mountain. The process of perfecting is ever going on, and who shall say when or where it will stop? Nature has emerged out of so many catastrophes with added glories that we are perfectly justified in once more looking beyond fire and flood for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. The “new heavens” and the “new earth” shall be purified from every blot ; the thing becomes, with time, more reasonable ; all the splendid possibilities of the universe shall be realized ; earth and sky will cease to groan ; the whole creation shall be adorned as a bride for her husband.

II

But let us *compare the tenants of the respective paradises, and try to get some notion of the points in which glorified humanity shall excel primitive humanity.*

1. We find, then, that the humanity of the future has attained *a higher organization*. The grandest object in the primitive paradise was man himself, and yet we know that his corporeal nature was not of the noblest. For ages sceptics laughed at the idea that we were made out of the dust, but nobody laughs now. God always laughs last. Man was made of the dust of the ground, and wonderful as his organization was it had necessarily many limitations and imperfections. But the body of the future shall be "a house which is from heaven"; a body of spirituality, strength, and beauty. One of the central facts of Christianity is the resurrection of our Lord; He came forth from the tomb with a body that had passed into a higher type—spiritual, majestic, incorruptible. Christianity gives the race the promise, the pattern, the pledge of a splendid physical perfection. O this poor body! It has been racked and tortured, wronged and punished, mutilated and deformed, it bleeds and faints until decay's effacing fingers wipe out its last lingering traces of beauty and bravery. But courage; gazing

on the risen body of our Lord we are comforted, for these bodies of our humiliation shall be "changed and made like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself." Modern knowledge has nothing to say against this expectation of a nobler incorporation. Science assures us that this body of ours has already passed through marvellous processes of refinement and transformation; that it has been mysteriously uplifted and unfolded, articulated and transfigured into all its present richness of faculty and competence; science, therefore, has nothing to urge against the possibility or probability of further resurrections and transfigurations in our physical nature. If God took a dirty germ out of the mud and evolved it into the complexity and perfection of the human body as we know it, the masterpiece of the physical universe, who shall say what God can bring out of this wonderful development? After reading your *Ascent of Man* why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead? You may believe, or you may not believe in the evolution of the body after the Darwinian theory, but certainly the science that gives this account of the genesis of the body has nothing to say against another resurrection out of dust and darkness. The first man was made of the clod of the valley; but the body of our glory is fabricated of the lightning, of the wind, of

the rainbow, of the stars, of the sun when it shineth in its strength. "First that which is natural, then that which is spiritual." "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown in corruption, it is raised in glory."

2. Glorified humanity attains *supreme character*. The first man was, at best, an innocent child; the ultimate man shall be made perfect through suffering. Leaving that first garden, we passed into another called Gethsemane, and the latter shall through the grace of Christ do more for us than Eden could have done. The most wonderful and delightful thing going on in this world to-day is the evolution of character. In trial, difficulty, temptation, pressure, under manifold and unceasing tribulation, the race is attaining a strength of moral fibre, a depth of goodness, a power and beauty of holiness that shall make it the wonder and the pride of heaven. "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The elder did not point out to John seraph, or cherub, or archangel, he simply insisted that the entranced Apostle should see the perfected saints, for these are the very pride and glory of the upper universe. I remember a remarkable flower

show being held in London, when all the flowers exhibited were flowers grown in London. It is not much to grow splendid flowers in privileged places—in places where there is pure air, sweet light, silver dew; but think of growing palms and myrtles, roses and orchids in dingy courts, in murky cellars, in mean back-yards, on narrow window-sills, on the tiles among chimney-pots—think of growing prize blossoms in yellow fogs, stifling air, and amid the breath of the million. No wonder the Queen went to see it; it was one of the most pathetic of shows; a splendid triumph over dark and terrible conditions. So the elder did not fix John's eye on angel or seraph, for these grand flowers sprang and blossomed in the everlasting sunshine of the Throne; he exultingly pointed to the shapes of glory perfected down here in temptation, suffering, tears, struggle, mortality, martyrdom. Brethren, do not resent the tribulations of the present life, they are working out for you an exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. In the power and grace of Christ your sanctified discipline is establishing in the depths of your being a Divine and everlasting righteousness. The primitive man was, at the best, an innocent child; made perfect through suffering; you shall be presented faultless before the throne with exceeding great joy.

3. Glorified humanity attains *higher rank*—rank based on character." God created us "a little lower than the angels." But this was not God's final pur-

pose. "A little while inferior to the angels" (Heb. ii. 7). After probation and discipline humanity was to be clothed with the highest glory, exalted to sovereign rank and power. "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear : forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." We look mere sojourners, vanishing phenomena, but we are infinitely more than this, or such a price would not have been paid for our redemption. The events of Bethlehem and of Calvary declare our essential and unutterable greatness, and open the way for the realization of the greatness they proclaim. Christ lived ; He suffered ; He died ; He rose again ; He reigns for ever that He may bring many sons unto glory. Alas ! since we left that first paradise we have fallen into such sad humiliations and scepticisms that we doubt our greatness, and despairingly rank ourselves with the beasts that perish. Science is just now groping in the slime for the missing link, for a supposed organism which makes us one with the underworld, for the link which binds us to the beast, the newt, the worm, the dirt ; it has not hitherto found that link, although it may find it ; on that matter it is not the duty of the Church to pronounce any opinion, it is the business of science, and primarily does not concern us ; but, thank God, in the glorified Christ at the other end of the chain we have the missing link

binding us to the universe above us—the heavenly, the Divine, the eternal. Let us look more steadily to the golden link at the top, and trouble ourselves less about the missing link at the bottom. Let us not lose faith in ourselves because we have fallen on evil times, and appear sorry creatures. The entomologist tells us that the most highly endowed of all insects live for a time in apparently the most miserable conditions, and yet at last they flash in utmost splendour among the summer flowers ; the young eagle is a miserable, disappointing creature, naked and ugly in a rough nest of sticks, but it eventually inherits the sky, the sea, the sun ; month after month the human baby is utterly helpless and absurd, sucking and screaming, stretching out its hands for it knows not what, afflicted with obscure nightmares, passing through a long series of humiliating maladies, suffering, sobbing, struggling, and yet at last the ridiculous thing steps out a Homer, a Plato, a Shakespeare, a Milton, a Raphael, a Mozart. The greater the nature and destiny of a creature the deeper seem the humiliations through which it passes. And so to-day we are abased and forlorn, with infinite sorrows and fears, but the divinity is in us and will at last unfold its wings. We are now the chrysalis confined in dust and darkness, but to-morrow we sip the roses of paradise ; to-day we are uncomfortable fledglings in rude nests, vexed by all the storms of heaven, but before

this day is done we may soar to the sun behind the sun. As the great poet declares, man in this unhappy present is—

An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry,

yet the morning dawns, and the loving Father shall wipe away every tear from our face. Through mighty troubles are we being fitted for great destinies. He who has washed us from our sins in His own blood will make us kings and priests unto God and His Father, and we shall reign upon the earth.

4. Glorified humanity has found *nobler employment*. "And the Lord took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." That was the vocation of the primitive man. What is the task of the future? One flash of insight. "They serve Him day and night in His temple." It would be folly to attempt to indicate the exact character of celestial employments. I could tell much because I do not know; that is ever the man to tell. Paul who was caught up into paradise found it impossible to express what he saw, but people who have never been there set the gates ajar, nay, take them off their hinges and tell all. We cannot affirm; we know not on what errands our wings shall flash, what wonderful work our hands shall find to do. But let us be

sure that the race is being prepared for some higher ministry. Comparing the passage from Genesis with that from the Revelation, we find that humanity has passed from the outer court of a more physical service to the inner sanctuary of an intellectual, a spiritual, and an immediate service of God. And do we not already see that man is beginning to escape from rougher, exhaustive toil, and that his ministry is becoming more and more a ministry of the mind? The ship is no more propelled by the labouring oar, there is no longer toiling in rowing, but simply the ringing of bells and a hand on the wheel. On the farm are now found a score of cunning instruments — sowers, reapers, binders — which perform swiftly and successfully work that once formed terrible tasks, wrought out in the bitter sweat of the face. In the factory a thousand mechanical ingenuities discharge work which once reduced the workman to drudgery ; now he simply “minds” the loom. The signs of the times are not in the constellations of heaven, they are down here, and the sewing machine is one: it abolishes the old seamstress, and hushes the song of the shirt. Much human work is still coarse, exhaustive, dangerous, humiliating, but more and more is the brute burden being lightened and abolished. We no longer put our shoulder to the wheel, we press our thumb on a button. And so shall the race cease to eat bread in sweat and tears and blood ;

science lightens their task ; the animal gives place to the intellectual ; the glorified worker ministers in the kingdom of the spirit. The first man appears with flint axe, rough spade, painful pruning-hook ; the final man towers with sceptre, censer, harp, the symbols of an intellectual and spiritual dominion, mastery and delight.

5. Glorified humanity enjoys *perfect freedom*. " And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, *but*." There is no " but " in the second paradise ; nothing is interdicted ; we are free to pluck any flower, to eat any fruit, to walk in any path. A clear sign this of the superiority of redeemed and regenerate man. He has become a perfectly purified and noble creature, needing no longer institutionalisms and decalogues. All the ordinances, the fences, the rubrics, the formalisms necessary to merely innocent creatures, to merely imperfect creatures, are done away for the spirits of just men made perfect. When we visit a gentleman, we do not find a warning card in the conservatory : You are forbidden to switch off the orchids with your cane. We do not find in the grounds an ominous board threatening penalties against those who trample hyacinth or tulip beds. We do not find on the lawn a curt rebuke : Keep off the grass. The host knows that his visitors have too much sense and culture to need such directions and prohibitions, and he confidently leaves

them to their own sweet will. Now the Bible is such a series of instructions, limitations, and warnings. Let the orchids alone ; at your peril pluck the roses ; thou shalt not eat ; keep off the grass ; these are the admonitions on every page. But the time comes when such statutes and sanctions will be no longer necessary. The love of God abides for ever, but the commandments of Sinai are by-laws for the present distress. In Christ we are gaining that self-perception, that self-limitation, that self-impulse which fits for perfect and immortal liberty. Some of our writers teach that all legislation is a mistake : they say that if you agree with a law, there was no necessity to make it ; and that if you do not agree with it, it is tyranny to enforce it. There is a great truth at the bottom of their paradox ; they are right, only a little "previous." We are not yet ready for this absolute freedom, but in Christ we are preparing for it ! The glorious liberty wherewith Christ maketh free has a wide meaning and implies a liberty beyond any that Adam knew. We are under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father, but when that time comes, perfect vision, perfect purity and perfect love will fit us for freedom wide as the universe, and lasting as eternity. Virgil tells Dante as he entered Paradise, "Henceforward, take thine own pleasure for guide ; thou art beyond the steep ways, and beyond all art" ;—meaning, that the perfectly puri-

fied and noble human creature, having no pleasure but in right, is past all effort, and past all *rule*. God shall throw open to us the mighty universe with all its treasures and delights, leaving us to act as we will because we see light in His light, because our will has become one with His will, because the absolute purity of our disciplined nature is the guarantee for full and everlasting obedience.

6. Glorified humanity is *near to God*. The glory of the first paradise was not in its colours, its music, its clusters, but in the fact that God revealed Himself there in some special and powerful manner. He "walked amid the trees of the garden." The revelation of the future, however, is to be unspeakably more intimate and glorious. We "shall see His face." It was the supreme aspiration of Abraham, of Moses, of David, of Isaiah, to "see God." It was the burning desire of John, of Peter, of Paul, and of all the New Testament saints. The noblest spirits in all ages have expressed the same aspiration. In Christ that aspiration is being gratified. He will bring us right into the presence of eternal Beauty, Life, Love, Blessedness. The race is feeling after God if haply it may find Him. The hymn we so often sing—

Nearer, my God, to Thee !
Nearer to Thee,

is not a song of the individual merely, it is the song of the race. Alas, the race has sadly erred in its

quest ! It has seen God but faintly in its naturalisms, often mistaking the trees for the Divinity ; it has seen God vaguely in its pantheisms, dropping the substance to grasp the shadow ; it has seen Him darkly and grotesquely in its paganisms and idolatries ; but at last it finds Him in Jesus Christ. "This is the true God and eternal life."

Nearer, my God, to Thee !
Nearer to Thee,

is a song going up in many languages, and through naturalisms, pantheisms, idolatries, agnosticisms, through stony griefs, uplifted crosses, as well as through epochs of growth and blessing, is the race feeling after God, and Christ is ever lifting the veil and making the vision more clear and satisfying. "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it : for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it."

Brethren, the best of everything is before you. Do not believe that the world is near its end, it is just coming to a decent beginning. We have hardly yet shaken the mud from us. The best things of to-day are barbarisms. The moon sets behind us, but the sun rises before us. A new literature, better manners, milder laws, a vaster unity, abundance, brotherhood, peace, glory to God in the highest,

good will towards men—all are coming, fast coming.
The world began with a paradise, and it shall end
with one. The first was a corner of the planet;
the second shall stretch

From where the rising sun salutes the morn,
To where he lays his head of glory on the rocking deep.

The first had two tenants; the second shall be
peopled with ransomed millions. The first perished;
but of the second it is written that her sun shall no
more go down, neither shall her moon withdraw its
shining. Get this paradise into your own heart;
then see to it that Christ's Church to-day becomes a
close foreshadowing of the coming glory and glad-
ness; and, lastly, push out the green border into the
barren wastes beyond until the whole earth shall be a
watered garden sleeping in an everlasting summer of
love and beauty. The Lord hasten it in His time.

THE RELATION OF THE SPIRITUAL TO
THE WORLDLY LIFE

“Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord.”

—*Rom.* xii. 11.

XIII

THE RELATION OF THE SPIRITUAL TO THE WORLDLY LIFE

WE take occasion from the text to maintain—

I

That the spiritual life is perfected through the worldly life.

1. When the Scriptures insist that the spiritual life is the real life, they do not imply that the worldly life is necessarily antagonistic to the spiritual. They do not enjoin the ascetic life as against the worldly life; they never glorify ecclesiastical life as against the worldly life. There is nothing whatever of this kind in the New Testament.

The Greek held that the æsthetic life was incompatible with vulgar toil. He gave himself up to his pictures, books and statues, to the theatre, orchestra and gardens; whilst the helot was condemned to the rough work of the nation. The plough, the spade, the sickle, the loom, the trowel, would have spoiled his superfine master. The Roman

entertained much the same view of practical life ; he considered it fatal to intellectual greatness and efficacy. The merchant, the artisan, the mechanic and the labourer were despised by the masters of the world. Roman writers are silent in respect to great material improvements which had no material relation to military or political objects ; they held mechanical operations and contrivances in contempt. Says Cicero : " The occupations of all artisans are base, and the shop can have nothing of the respectable." And this prejudice against trade and industry is even now far from being extinct. The Christian religion, on the contrary, breathes no word against manual and commercial callings. It does not regard the highest life of man as incompatible with the meanest kind of occupation. The spiritual life is not to be separated from daily toil, as the Roman separated the philosophic life, or as the Greek separated the artistic. We see this in the life of our Lord. Christ gives no hint of asceticism ; He lends no sanction to any merely ecclesiastical virtue. He came the Son of the carpenter. His whole example is identified with the life of the toiling million. He who was revealed to teach us how to live, showed that the purest, noblest, heavenliest life is thoroughly human, and stands in closest relationship with homeliest scenes and duties. The same doctrine is enforced by the lives of the Apostles. " Buying and selling, handicraft and farming, were

in the early Christian Church not inconsistent with the office of a Christian minister. . . . The bishops and presbyters of those early days kept banks, practised medicine, wrought as silversmiths, tended sheep, or sold their goods in open market." The ascetic and ecclesiastical view of the spiritual life came later, when the essential truths of Christianity began to be obscured.

2. On the contrary, so far from teaching that the spiritual life is antagonistic to life of secular action, the New Testament teaches that the spiritual is directly related to the worldly life, and that the former is perfected by the latter. The cares of domesticity, the duties of citizenship, the exercises of trade, the implications of industry and toil, are all influentially soliciting, training, invigorating, unfolding, and in a thousand ways perfecting the faculties of the soul and disciplining them in righteousness. If we observe the intellectual life we see at once that men can never, except with extreme disadvantage, divorce themselves from tangible things. If from any motive intellectual men isolate themselves from the commonplace world of facts, if they deny their senses, if they attempt to pursue their studies in a purely metaphysical manner, they immediately and manifestly suffer. The painter who refuses to go to nature soon paints badly. He cannot persist in evolving faces and landscapes from his consciousness and continue to produce work of veracity and power. To

neglect the colours of summer, the features of the landscape, the lustres of dawn, the aspects of sea and sky, to neglect the facts of anatomy, the lines of physiognomy, the living face, the reality of things, is to sacrifice the truth, the splendour, the magic of art. The painter must live with the visible world, follow her subtle changes, know her as only genius and love can know; he can lay hold of ideal beauty only through close daily contact with corporeal things. This is true of the musician. The musical critic declares that the composer falls into a great error when he is led to regard the phenomenon of tone in such an abstract light that not only all connection with the corporeal basis of sounding objects is disregarded, but tone is made a purely ideal phenomenon and is volatilized. The musician is warned not to lose sight of the real material foundation of music, however strongly he may attach himself to its spiritual importance. He must not merely hear the note in his brain, he must exercise his senses and test his conceptions on string and pipe. Some judges think that Beethoven's deafness rendered the music of his later years vague and wooden. It is thus, also, with the poet. He must cultivate close acquaintance with the actual world if his poetry is to be true and pure. Some hold that Milton's poetry distinctly suffered through his blindness; denied fellowship with the fresh forms and colours of creation, his descriptions of nature became

amorphous. It is almost universally recognised that artists cannot with impunity exclude the actual world and resign themselves to reverie and metaphysics. If an order of intellectual monkery were to be created and its members carefully withdrawn from the objective world—its painters denied all models, its composers all instruments, its poets all spectacles—its creations would forthwith become bizarre and worthless. The intellectual man must be educated through the objective world, his ideals the result of the infinite reactions of the brain and the material environment ; only through the constant exercise of the senses can we reach the eternal truth and beauty revealed in the things which are made.

All this is most true in relation to our spiritual life—that life can grow only as it is elicited, exercised, conditioned by our worldly life. The world is a magnificent apparatus of discipline with which no spiritual man can affect to dispense. We cannot work out our highest life in isolation, abstraction, asceticism, in independence of daily, trivial, vulgar life. It is not by isolating ourselves from earthly things that we shall lay hold of the Divine life ; it is by the true use and sanctification of the earthly life that we attain the Divine and the eternal. If intellectual monasticism would issue in monstrous masterpieces, in fantastic symphonies, in bizarre poesy, so any shrinking from natural worldly life and its relations produces deformed and morbid character utterly without

attractiveness. Be not afraid of secular life and all that it involves. You must handle money, enter into business, mix with men, follow your trade, cultivate human relations, register your vote in the polling booth, know all the infinite discipline and friction of a responsible and ever-changing life. It is through the limitations, the collisions, the surprises, the monotonies of this work-a-day world that we lay hold on the life which is life indeed.

II

The worldly life is perfected through the spiritual life. It is often argued that the spiritual life is injurious to the worldly life. Secularists profess that the two lives are mutually exclusive. They conclude that just as we are occupied with a higher world we become incapable of making the best of this. Now this is simply a question of fact. Can it then be justly said that it has that consequence? Multitudes of spiritual men, full of religious enthusiasm, play their part in the heart of the busy world and yet excel in practical life. Take the members of any secular society to-day and compare them with the members of the nearest Christian Church, and we may confidently predict that the results of such a comparison will abundantly prove that a spiritual faith is not injurious to the practical instinct. But even if instances can be specified where

intense spiritual devotion has seemed to unfit men for successfulness in secular affairs, where spiritual enthusiasm has caused saints to neglect terrestrial relations and civic duties, we must be careful not to draw too large an inference from such facts.

Philosophers are sometimes exceedingly detached from the world, strangely careless about national struggles in which it would seem they ought to be passionately interested. What about Goethe and his lack of patriotism? He was absorbed by singers and actors, by art and literature, and hardly cast a glance at the struggles of the Fatherland. Some poets are notoriously indifferent to practical questions, they ignore contemporaneous politics, they utterly fail in monetary management. Shakespeare's writings contain few and faint reflections of the great age in which he lived; and some of the critics accuse Tennyson of insensibility to the social and material aspects of his time. Naturalists, also, like Audubon, have been noted for their aloofness; dreaming in the green wood, they missed the chances of the Stock Exchange. Are we then to draw the large conclusion that philosophy, poetry, and science are unfavourable to practical life? Are we, in the interests of civilization, to discourage this intellectual transcendentalism? Surely not. These men of thought and imagination are guilty of a certain unworldliness and impracticability; but we know that they immensely enrich the world. The

legend tells that Newton cut in the door a large orifice for the cat and a small one for the kitten, overlooking the obvious fact that the first aperture served for both ; and the average practical man makes merry over the blunder of the astronomer whose eye was dazzled with the infinite spaces and splendours of the firmament. Yet Newton, stumbling in trivial matters, was enriching the world beyond all successful shopkeeping. And we know that whatever the other-worldliness of our metaphysicians, bards, and philosophers may be, they are precisely the men who make us masters of our environment, and who in a special measure enrich us with the forces and treasures of the world. This is true in the very fullest degree of spiritual life ; it may be seen sometimes dreaming and aloof, but it is nevertheless the fountain of inspiration, the secret of civilization, the condition of power and progress.

We boldly affirm that the whole material life of society here and now is secured and perpetuated by this spirituality. It is the habit of the secularist to represent the love of God as so much precious feeling dissipated in the abyss ; to consider the worship of God as vital energy scattered in the air ; to teach that the thought of the future is thought withdrawn from a present which demands our concentrated strength ; but in fact, a living confidence in God, a living hope of everlasting life, a living faith in the higher law, is the golden bond which holds

society together—the dynamic which keeps the world moving to the glorious goal. The secularist mocks the spiritualist, and reproaches him as “a child crying for the moon.” Well, let the child cry for the moon ; it will be a sorry day for the world when the child ceases to cry for it. The child’s crying for the moon is the mainspring of civilization. Isaac Newton in infancy cried for the moon, and when he became a man, in a very true and glorious sense, he got it, together with the sun and all the stars. Never crush the aspirations of men, especially their highest aspirations and hopes. Stretching out our hands to that which is beyond urges all things onward to a large and final perfection. Looking to the things which are unseen and eternal we inherit in their fulness the things seen and temporal.

It is only in the grace of Christ—grace at once so simple and so complex—that we are able to live this dual life, to solve this difficult problem. It is comparatively easy to live the ascetic life, to get clean out of the world, to be entirely free from its complications and snares, to pursue a simple life of worship and contemplation. It is easy, also, to live the worldly life, being altogether selfish, indulgent, and earthly. But to live within all the movement and pressure of the world as a spiritual man, is of all problems the most difficult. It is the problem that Christ constantly solves in and for His people.

THE LIBERTY OF SIN

“ Therefore thus saith the Lord ; Ye have not hearkened unto Me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour : behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine ; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.”—*Jer.* xxxiv. 17.

XIV

THE LIBERTY OF SIN

THE Word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah that all bondservants in Israel should be forthwith emancipated. At first the princes obeyed, and the enslaved were allowed to go free. But eventually the princes played falsely, and once more brought their old servants into bondage. Then comes the prophecy with its terrible irony. Let us look at the two main points of the text which are deeply interesting to us to-day.

I

The mutiny against law. We see in the text a revolt from law. In the first instance the governors felt the reasonableness of the commandment, they agreed to it ; but at length they violated it. And this spirit of revolt against the higher law is ever working in us and displaying itself in various forms of disobedience. We break the bonds God puts upon us, and cast His cords from us.

1. There is a *theoretical* repudiation of the law. Literary men are ever urging upon us that the moral law, as given in revelation, is unphilosophical, and they confidently aver that the sooner it is renounced by all educated people the better. They ingeniously find us a way out of all the ten great precepts. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Say they, There is no Lord God ; an instructed man recognises no God whatever ; to love God is to waste the heart's best treasure on an empty sky. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This, they assure us, is not good enough, such morality is under our feet, it is mere selfishness, the true rule being, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and ignore thyself. And we all know that to overdo is to undo. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Say they, This will not do, you must get rid of the notion of a personal relation to a personal God. You must, if you are rational, take His name in vain : you must call Him Law, Power, Necessity, Fate. "Keep holy the Sabbath day." This is a narrow arbitrary Jewish regulation to be got rid of as soon as possible. "Honour thy father and thy mother." Says one of our writers sympathetically : "The Christian communities of Europe have long been drifting towards a subversion of parental authority altogether, and, in this country at least, the goal has almost been reached. The parental character among modern Englishmen may be said

to have lost all its majesty, and to have become trivial. In a greater degree than it has yet done parental authority is likely to pass from the individual to the State." "Do no murder." They reply, That is a moot point; much is to be said for euthanasia, for infanticide, for suicide; the sacredness of human life is no part of the creed of cultivated men. "Thou shalt not steal." In a true condition of society, they affirm, this commandment will become obsolete. The true condition of society is communistic, not individualistic, everything belongs to everybody, and when this is duly recognised stealing will be impossible, what your brother has is yours, take it. "Thou shalt not commit adultery." They protest, The whole marriage law and relation is a barbarism—we want freedom in everything, especially free love. Our literature is full of talk like this, tampering in plausible words with the sacred bond. "Not bear false witness." A writer in the *Fortnightly Review*, treating on Scientific Sin, says: "The error of over-prizing truth is quite common. There are many who seem positively to worship truth, as if truth were the essence of all goodness. The duty of lying is a painful and uncommon duty; yet the duty of lying is one that has to be seriously considered." Most of us have known a few people who have been most exemplary in the fulfilment of this painful duty. "Thou shalt not covet." That is exactly what we ought to do, say our new guides;

what right has our neighbour to ox or ass or anything else when we have none? Much modern literature under bland rhetoric is only a plea for envy and covetousness. So one by one the Commandments are argued away and we are "emancipated." The Saviour taught us that heaven and earth might pass away, but that the moral commandment in its essence should persist in absolute authority and force ; yet eloquent writers to-day are ready to dismiss it as being false and impertinent.

2. And if there is a theoretical repudiation of the law on the part of the literary few, is there not a *personal, practical* mutiny against it on the part of many? Thousands are ready to trifle with the law, to set it at defiance, who would not give intellectual and verbal expression to their lawlessness. In manifold ways we criticise the law, fret at it, evade and violate it. In our early days we resent it, and when we have been taught by long experience, we are still exasperated by the claims and limitations of the law which exalts itself above our fleshly desires, our temporal interests and ambitions. We spurn the circumscriptions which deny us so much, and in blind passion break into forbidden ground.

And yet how gracious and beautiful is the law ! How generous is the edict referred to in the text, enjoining mercy and brotherliness upon the rich and great ! And the whole moral law, as

expressed in revelation, is equally rational and benign. The "commandments are not grievous." No, indeed, they are gracious. Every commandment is an illumination, a light shining in a dark place to guide our feet in a dim and perilous way. Every commandment is a salvation. The commandment enjoining love is to save us from the damnation of selfishness; enjoining meekness to save us from the devil of pride; enjoining purity to save us from the hell of lust. Every commandment is a benediction. We think the commandments one thing and the beatitudes another, but really the commandments are beatitudes. "Moreover by them is Thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward." Forget not the beauty and the graciousness of the moral law! Scientists are never weary of descanting on the grandeur of natural law--the law which builds the sky, which transfigures the flower, which rules the stars. The scientist, the mathematician, the musician proclaim that law is good, that the secret of the world's beauty is found in the wonderful laws which God wrote in tables of stone long before Moses came. And if natural law, which rules things, is so sublime, how much does that moral law which rules spirits excel in glory! "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." It is the secret of paradise. It is the expression of God's eternal perfection. It is the secret of God's blessedness and ours. "Thou art the

blessed God ; teach me Thy statutes." As we keep His statutes we share His blessedness.

And yet how blindly do we mutiny against the great words of light and love ! Some time ago the newspaper related that a herd of cattle was being driven through a long, dark, wooden tubular bridge. Here and there in the planks were knot-holes, which let in the sun in bars of light. The animals were afraid of these sun-bars ; they shied at them, were terrified at them, and then, leaping over them, made a painful hurdle-race of it, coming out at the other end palpitating and exhausted. We act just as madly. The laws of God are golden rays in a dark path, they are for our guidance and infinite perfecting and consolation ; but they irritate us, they enrage us, we count them despotic barriers to liberty and happiness, and too often we put them under our feet. "So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee."

II

The liberty of licence.—"Behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine ; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth." Two could play at that game, and they themselves should become slaves and exiles. The state of men is truly awful when they have disowned

law. These nobles wished to be free themselves whilst enslaving their brethren, but in attempting this they gave themselves away into servitude ; they wished to enrich themselves, and they lost everything ; they sought personal indulgence at the expense of their neighbours, and suffered sword and famine and pestilence. Brethren, disobedience always means bondage, disgrace, suffering, death.

What a difference it makes in life, whether you keep the law or break it ! Years ago I was conducted through a great prison. The jailor had a burden of keys, and there was always some iron gate in the way : at every few steps were locks, bolts, and bars—dim corridors, grim cells, frowning gratings, dreary treadmill. It was a painful tour—no sense of liberty, only an overwhelming sense of law. The prisoners were “emancipated” ones ; emancipated from a great deal that people outside enjoy—emancipated into oatmeal, a severe head-dress, coarse raiment and a number in place of a name. So we beheld the liberty of the prison-house. A while after this a gentleman showed me through his large conservatories. I noticed that he carried as many keys as the jailor, and at every few steps he also was unlocking and locking doors. ‘But what a different sense one had this time ! Each new scene into which we entered was a chamber of beauty ;—now it was a cool fernery full of elegant forms ; now a house of stately palms ; now it was a crystal palace

of gladioli, begonias, roses, passion-flowers ; now it was a choice shrine of wonderful orchids ; now an orangery ; now a vinery gorgeous with purple and golden clusters—it was all loveliness, fragrance, delight. This time the keys were golden ; they made music as they turned. Whenever a door was unlocked it opened into a realm of beauty ; every time one was locked it made that realm of glory secure. The jailor with his keys was a horrid spectre ; the gardener with his keys might have been the elder showing John bits of paradise. It is much like this in life. Transgress the law, and law becomes terrible ; you convert yourself into a convict, each new stage of life is a new cell, and the cemetery at last is the prison yard. Keep the law, and life is a succession of interesting scenes and experiences, you walk at liberty because you keep God's statutes, youth is fresh and delightful, manhood is honourable, age has wonderful interests, consolations and hopes, and the opening of the last gate, which is of pearl, lets you into the King's own garden, upon whose fadeless bloom Time may not breathe.

A liberty to the sword, the famine, and the pestilence ! Most awful is the liberty of unrighteousness ; who can express its fulness of woe ! Some of you have visited the Castle of Chillon on the Lake of Geneva. In that castle is a dungeon containing a well, at the bottom of which you discern the waters of the lake. That shaft is called the way of liberty

Tradition says that in the old days the perfidious jailor in the darkness of the dungeon would whisper to the prisoner, "Three steps and liberty," and the poor dupe hastily stepping forward fell down this shaft, thickly planted with knives and spikes: the mutilated, bloody corpse dropping into the lake. That is precisely the liberty of sin. The dupe of temptation, taking a leap in the dark, is forthwith pierced with many sorrows, and sooner or later, mangled and bleeding disappears in the gulf. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death,"

1. Feel the madness of contending with God, for that is exactly what sin means. How incredibly absurd it is that a creature should enter upon a conflict with the Creator, that a creature should enter upon such an utterly hopeless opposition. A writer on morals says: "Morality is a matter of social discipline; it is not an inherent principle in nature like the law of gravitation, but is a sort of understanding arrived at by nations or communities for the better regulation of their affairs." Now, I want you to believe that morality *is* an inherent principle of the universe like the law of gravitation, and that you can no more with impunity violate the Ten Commandments than that you can with impunity violate the law of gravitation. If you transgress the laws of truth, justice and charity you will be damned, as certainly as you will be physically damned

if you do not practically believe in chemistry and gravitation. Let us not revolt from God and His laws ; we cannot reach victory through such madness.

2. Only through self-limitation do you attain the highest liberty and blessedness. All civilization is the giving up of liberty to find a nobler liberty. The other day we heard a bachelor say that he should think twice before he parted with his liberty. Now, he was at once right and wrong. Marriage in one sense is a surrender of liberty, but a true marriage is a surrender of an inferior freedom to receive a freedom far worthier. So, if you would secure the largest liberty of all, you must deny yourself in things of imagination, caprice and passion, and you will find the royal law of liberty. The narrow gate is the gate of heaven.

3. If you are to keep the law, you must seek the strength of God in Christ. Born of God ; living in fellowship with Him ; full of faith, of love, of hope ; we shall find the yoke of the law easy and its burden light. The inner force is equal to the outward duty. The scientist tells us that the atmosphere presses upon us with a weight of some fifteen pounds to the square inch, so that a grown man carries a burden of about fifteen tons. How is it that the weight does not crush us ? The fact is, the gases and fluids inside our body press outwards and balance the external pressure, so that we are unconscious of it.

So far from feeling the air to be lead, we speak of the lightest things as being light as air. It is much like this with the law of God. The internal force in all Christ's true disciples has become equal to the exterior demand. Our conscience, heart and will are filled with heavenly, profound, irresistible strength, and the weight of the law is the weight of a rose leaf. When we are born of God, know His love, and realize His grace, we are able to say with our Master : " I delight to do Thy will, O my God."

THE PARTHIAN ARROW

B.S.

Q

“For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight : . . . for
the God of Israel will be your reward.”—*Isaiah* lii. 12.

XV

THE PARTHIAN ARROW¹

THIS is the last Sunday of the year ; we are about parting with the old year for ever ; and in the text we find seasonable and precious teaching for this day. It is a delightful thing to know that God goes before to lead us ; it is none the less delightful to know that He closes the procession, that He is the rearguard of His Israel. He has beset us behind as well as before, and laid His hand upon us. Let us not think that this fact of God going behind us is a truth of lesser consequence. The rearguard of an army is its keystone, it has to preserve the compactness of the whole host ; and it is a truth of the first importance that the glory of Jehovah closes the rear.

I

God our rereward means that *the God of Israel will come between us and the sorrows of the past*. When God came down to deliver Israel from Egypt, He

¹ Preached on the last Sunday of the year.

said, "I have seen thy sorrows and heard thy cry." In the years behind us we, also, have had our sorrows, and God has heard our cry ; and whilst in one sense we leave our misfortunes and troubles behind, in another and far deeper sense we do not necessarily leave them behind. Our losses, disappointments, humiliations, blunders, wrongs, and bereavements still pursue us, harassing our soul, drinking up our spirit. We brood over these memories and they engender in us vexation, cynicism, unbelief, weakness, despair. Oh ! how vividly the dark things live with us, mocking, tormenting, paralysing us. That loss I suffered, am I never to dismiss it, is it always to haunt me, spoiling the peace and bravery of my soul ? That wrong I suffered, am I never to forget it, is it ever to work bitterly in my imagination and feeling ? That bereavement I suffered, am I never to get over it, am I to find no more pleasure in God's gifts and greatness, is my soul from out the shadow that lies floating on the floor to be lifted nevermore ? God, if you seek Him, will be your rereward. He will emancipate from the sorrowful past. He will give you power to look upon it with tranquillity ; He will give you strength to bear it ; He will give you wings to transcend it ; He will give you sweet assurances that it has not been all in vain ; He will give you comfort and peace in which you shall forget the sting and bitterness of past years. In the Art Gallery of Manchester is a striking picture

entitled "The Waters of Lethe." On one side of the magic river is a crowd of the old, the disfigured, the shrunken, the haggard, the sad ; but passing through the mystic waters they reappear on the other bank of the river in the bloom of immortal youth, their lips tuned to song, they walk amid asphodels, they are crowned with amaranth. Oh ! that our spirit might pass through some such stream of forgetfulness, of reinvigoration, of rejuvenescence, and once more be fresh and free and bright. It may be so. The grace of God is more than the fabled Lethe ; rest in that grace, bathe your soul in it, leave there your solitudes and regrets, your grief and shame, leave them with Him who is the rereward of Israel and you shall find rest unto your soul.

II

God our "rereward" means that *the God of Israel will come between us and the sins of the past*. Just as the Egyptians followed the Israelites, so the sins of the past follow us clamouring and menacing. As Solomon says : "Evil pursueth sinners." Our sins are more numerous than the hosts of Egypt. "If I would count them they are more in number than the hairs of mine head." They are far more terrible than the Egyptians. The memory of sin is the most fatal arrow of the retreating year, and its quiver is

full of them. All our sins follow us with cries for retribution. Our conscience tells of the persistence of sin ; science knows full well that the law of the universe cannot be violated with impunity. Dear brethren, God in Christ is our rereward. He comes between us and the guilty past which follows us with paralysing maledictions. When the Israelites looked back they saw that "the standard of Dan was their rereward"; it came between them and the destroying Egyptians. It was a comfort indeed to see the standard of that powerful tribe between them and the might of Egypt. So, looking back to the past and beholding its accusing memories, its threatening faults and failures, it is a mighty comfort to see uplifted the most powerful and princely standard of all, the standard of the Cross, and to know that the love and merit, the grace and strength of Christ come between us and the shouting rabble of our sins. We do not know *how* God delivers us from all our past sins, we need not be curious to know, it is one of the things we can afford to leave ; but that He has power to forgive sin is a glorious truth of which we must never lose hold.

My brother, let not the past embarrass you, let it not affright, let it not cast you down, although it is at your heels like the avenger of blood. God is your rear guard. He stands between you and that foolish past, that stained past, that wild past, that useless past, that dead past. Do you cry plaintively, peni-

tently, "Remember not past years"? He will not remember them. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "The glory of the Lord is thy rereward." The glory of His matchless grace, His dying love, His omnipotent power, His boundless promise come behind thee, sheltering thee from the chariots and horsemen of Egypt. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

III

God our "rereward" means that *the God of Israel stands by us ever counteracting the retrograde tendencies that we discover in ourselves*. Israel not only needed salvation from the Egyptians, they often required to be saved from themselves; some of them had strange desires to return to Egypt, and God went behind them to keep them from slipping again into the old slavery. And so it is with men in all ages, there is in us a tendency to revert to baser life. It is so with nations. They move slowly up an incline to civilization, they are ever disposed to the lower levels, and God has to put on a certain brake-power to arrest their fallings away. It was so

with Israel. God had a system of checks by which He constantly sought to save His people. So the nations still exhibit the same backsliding tendency, and God, if they seek Him, is their merciful rereward. He goes before the nations, leading them, preparing the way for them, lifting them ; He goes behind the nations, neutralising their disposition to degradation, making it difficult for them to sink back into the depths out of which they have arisen. What God does with nations, He does with individuals. Personally we move on a gradient, and so long as we are united to Christ He ever lifts us to higher platforms. But ever and anon the nexus is broken, some link or other goes, a loss of faith, a violent temptation, a careless deed, a fatal hour, and we begin to slide. What then? The Lord is our rereward. He awakes in our mind solemn, restraining considerations ; He arouses our conscience ; He touches our heart ; He sends messengers to us ; He orders our circumstances ; so that we are held back from destruction. We need God constantly to save us. "Brethren, if a man be *overtaken* in a fault." Our faults are all after us, panting to overtake us. Our constitutional faults sometimes seem entirely shaken off, but they are on our track, close behind, ready to spring upon us — loiter a moment and they overhaul us, and once more make us their victims. The old anger flings into our soul a hellish spark ; the old vanity tempts us to strut and then

trips us up; the old sloth sings into our ear a lullaby; the old appetite handicaps us with a burden of thick clay; the old covetousness allures by dropping some golden apple on the path. We need salvation here as much as we need it anywhere. "The glory of the Lord is thy rereward." He not only goes before, alluring us with the ideal of a nobler life, He also goes behind, saving us from the encroachments of the baser self. His glorious protecting, delivering, quickening grace comes between us and the faults of our youth and the faults of our constitution which we have left behind, but which ever pursue and seek to bring us again into bondage. Trust God, claim all His grace, and your old sins shall be annihilated, even as God drowned the host of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.

IV

God our "rereward" means that *the God of Israel will save us from the special unknown perils of life.* The rearguard protected Israel on a specially defenceless side, and we need similar protection. The enemies before us we can more or less distinctly see—we can watch, we can prepare for them—but the enemies behind our backs are specially dangerous. In human life there is much of this species of peril. Men sometimes do a good deal against us behind our back. The Psalmist often refers to

this. David was a fighting man, he was never afraid of an open fight, he rather liked one ; but there was a mode of warfare of which he was afraid. His enemies privily bent the bow, they dug pits, they spread nets, by treachery they sought to bring him to the dust. The Psalmist was specially fearful concerning this kind of opposition. And in all our lives there is much to fear from secret hostility. Men sometimes say a good deal behind our back, and we feel this to be most trying. "If they would only say it to my face I should not care." It is the "back-biting" that you dread. And much of the hostility of the devil finds this expression. He loves to work in the dark, to strike a blow from behind, to take us by surprise—temptation is full of the element of the unknown, the intangible, the incommensurable. But let us not be alarmed. God is our rereward. We are sometimes told that in the inventory of the Christian armour given in the New Testament there is no armour for the back. In one sense, perhaps, that is true, but there *is* armour for the back. God's own presence is your shining panoply to protect against every shaft of calumny, against every fiery dart of wickedness, against the secret malice and machinations of men and devils. Look straight on, God watches behind, and He shall hide thee in His pavilion from the strife of human tongues and from the subtlety of hell. Jeroboam caused an ambushment to come

about behind Judah ; so Israel was before Judah and behind it. And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind ; and they cried unto the Lord, and the priests sounded with the trumpets. Then the men of Judah gave a shout ; and it came to pass that God smote Jero-boam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. So to-day, the battle is before and behind ; but if we cry unto God He will be round about on every side and give us deliverance.

V

God our "rereward" means that the *God of Israel is mindful of the weakest of His people*. The rearguard had the duty of gathering together the lame, the faint, the feeble, to see that nothing was lost, that none were left behind. Dan was called "the collector of all the camps." And a fine company Dan would have to collect—the weak, the wayward, the silly, the disheartened, the slow, the dull, the poor creatures generally !

Ah ! there is a grand truth for us here, God is at the fag-end of the world. The fag-end of the world is a bad place to be in. Who is there ? The idle, the thriftless, the big fool, the big sinner, and a great host of the sons and daughters of misery who are weak, ignorant, unfortunate, desolate. What is to come of the fag-end ? It is a bad look-out for them.

What does science say about the weak creatures that fall behind in the mighty march of the world? It tells us that the human life of the planet resembles the retreat of the French from Moscow, the strong making good their escape, but the faint stragglers falling a prey to the wolves that howl on every side. What is to become of the hindmost? "The devil take the hindmost." Poor hindmost! But this Book tells another story. "The glory of the Lord is our rereward." God is not only with the strong, the wise, and the good, He is with the most foolish and wicked, to give them another chance. God is not only with the nations in the front of civilization, He is with the black man, the red man, the yellow man; the tribes of people at the fag-end of civilization are His care, acted on by His grace, called to His glory. God is not only with the West-end of genius, wealth, fashion, He is with the East-end in its ignorance, rags, and utter wretchedness. No; the devil shall not necessarily take the hindmost; Christ with infinite pity seeks the outcasts, the remainders, the dregs, the submerged, the fag-end.

God is at the fag-end of the Church. There are some poor creatures there. Many of us are weak and faltering enough, ready to drop away, to slip back to Egypt. But God regards the frailest and most spiritless amongst us with compassion and sympathy. He is not only in the front with the positive, the militant, the illustrious saints, but He is

in the rear with the doubtful, the faint, the dull, the heavy-hearted, the "almost gone."

Dear brethren, let us arise to-day to pursue our march with fresh courage and hope. God is before us and anticipates all our needs and perils. God closes our procession, gathering us, keeping us from the perils in our rear. "Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight." March on with dignity, assurance, peace. We are winning ; we shall win. We are marching on ; we shall arrive.

THE HIDDEN SACKCLOTH

“And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes (now he was passing by upon the wall) ; and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh.”—2 *Kings* vi. 30.

XVI

THE HIDDEN SACKCLOTH

BENHADAD, the Syrian, besieged Samaria, and the famine that arose in the city in consequence of the siege was so dreadful that one mother accused another before the king of not keeping her agreement to slay her child for food, as she the complainant had done. Horrified by the shocking recital of the woman the king rends his garment, when it becomes manifest that he wears a penitential garment on his body. That hidden sackcloth, suddenly revealed, suggests much matter for thought. Men still have hidden griefs as the old king had, and the pathetic incident in the text teaches lessons we shall be all the better for considering.

I

The text teaches a lesson of *restraint*. Jehoram wore his sackcloth "within." The true king always wears it thus—the vulgar nature is blatant and demonstrative, the royal nature reticent and secretive. You see this in the way in which people bear

their infirmities and sorrows. Lord Byron was an illustrious instance of a vulgar nature, ever intent upon decking his sorrows with the spangles of the theatre ; and multitudes do the same thing on a meaner stage. In thoughtlessness and selfishness we thrust our personal ailments and afflictions upon our friends ; we wear our sackcloth outside, we wear it always, and if we do not wear it out we wear our friends out. Nobler souls suffer silently, often smilingly. You see the same thing in the way in which people sustain poverty and narrow circumstances. Some are by no means shy about the matter. They wear their ragged sackcloth on the outside, and are always ready to make an extra slit in it whenever they see a chance of exciting sympathy and aid. But others bear this bitter trial most bravely. It raises one's sense of the dignity of human nature to think of the magnificent manner in which many people suffer honourable poverty. By pathetic ingenuities they hide their struggles, and maintain their self-respect—they wear the sackcloth "within." You see the same thing in the way in which men bear bereavements. What a display some make of their sackcloth ! Not the scarlet of the soldier, the purple of the king, or the rainbow robe of beauty evinces more pride and vanity than do certain mourners in the fashion of their crape. Their sackcloth is rich and artistic as any Babylonish garment in Vanity Fair. But noble

natures despise all tricks and shows of grief, lamenting their great loss in the silence of a wounded soul. The deep, sincere, royal spirits shrink from display ; such mourners anoint their head, wash their face, and wear the sackcloth " within."

Let us lay to heart this lesson of reticence and silence. It is really of first importance that we should know how in trying days to seal our lips. It is not a question of taste merely, it is a question of character. Our great Master in this, as in so many other things, set us a true, grand example. As He entered upon His passion He said to His disciples : " Hereafter I will not talk much with you." Self-contained He would now be silent to men, talking only with God. The stream that lifts up its voice in the cataract among the hills and makes sweet music amid the stones of the valley is suddenly hushed as it merges itself in the sea, and Christ fell into a solemn silence as He came in sight of the ocean sorrow of Gethsemane and Calvary. Yes, silent toward men, but as John shows He talked much with God. The fellowship of earth availed no longer, and He turned to His Heavenly Father in impassioned and sustained fellowship and supplication. Our great failing is that we talk too much with men and too little with God. Oh ! if we would only open our soul in confidence to Him, how far better it would be for us ! He knows all about us ; He has beset us behind and before, and laid His

hand upon us ; He can best sustain and comfort us. We talk to men until they weary of our complaints, or if they sympathise with us their response is too often chaff well meant for grain, but entering into secret and wearing the sackcloth before God we find strong consolation and perfect peace in the grace that helps in time of need.

II

We are taught a lesson of *contentment*. The king as well as the people wore sackcloth, only the king's mourning was hidden. It is well to remind ourselves that the great, the brilliant, the opulent know bitter sorrows as the rest of us do. We are tempted to envy great men—the privileged men in purple, the gifted men, the men who win and wear garlands, but these sons of genius, of fortune, of greatness have invariably a pathetic side, only it is usually veiled. This is true of the men with splendid talents. Their works may not show a solitary trace of sadness : their pictures glow with colour, their stories flow with the careless ease of a wild bird's song, their music is that of golden strings, their eloquence a trumpet peal ; but when we learn the facts of their personal history we find that the most dreadful private griefs wounded and crushed them. It is almost invariably the case, and according to the splendour of their fame is the bitterness of their

affliction. Those best acquainted with the personal history of men of brilliant parts feel most strongly the truth of Carlyle's tremendous metaphor that "Genius is a ship on fire at sea for the diversion of the spectators on the shore." And it is much the same with rich men. They are covered with gold, but under the rich attire hides the poisoned tunic. An American journalist a while ago instituted inquiries touching the private life of their millionaires, and these sons of success certainly get their full tale of sorrows. Owners of fortunes that dazzle the imagination, yet in most instances they have a sobering share of earthly ills. One famous millionaire who has made his wealth out of provisions, by the irony of fate, is a martyr to dyspepsia. Another has so weakened his sight by excessive work that he lives in fear of total blindness. Another is so painfully nervous that he is compelled to shun all society. Others have cruel domestic griefs which take the sweetness out of life. Whilst in several cases devotion to money-making has destroyed in them the very faculty of enjoyment—a greater catastrophe than the loss of health. When we read of the brilliant costumes at their banquets and balls we forget the irritating, lacerating sackcloth underneath.

It is much the same with royalty. Think of the sorrows of royal houses—the tragedies which many of us can recall. What terrible catastrophes in the palaces of Russia! There can hardly be on the

earth a more pathetic figure than the Empress Eugénie. America has mourned the assassination of two of its Presidents; France also has known a similar tragedy. The splendid victories of Germany have been chastened by the touching sorrows of her royal house. A thrill of horror passed through Europe at the awful fate of the Emperor Maximilian in Mexico, and the papers still give glimpses of his widowed queen with wrecked reason in some retreat. The brilliant reign of our own Queen has from time to time been eclipsed by deep and cruel afflictions. They that wear soft raiment are in king's houses, but like the king in the text they wear a dark sore dress within. It is said that the Czar of Russia has forty-four distinct uniforms, but he has another which we suppose they did not count,—one with no threads of gold, no strands of purple in it, one never decorated by medal or star. These kings and queens, presidents and princes, share with us obscurer folk all the sorrows of mortality. We talk of "equality." The most real equality is the equality of experience, and rich and poor, great and small, meet together in loss and suffering and death. Well, you demur, still the grandeur of the great is a compensation for their grief. We are not sure of that. It is an aggravation as much as it is a compensation. A luxurious table is a sharp satire on a bad digestion; a braid of pearls and diamonds gives an added pang to an aching

brain ; a picture gallery is a mockery to failing sight ; a sick face is none the easier to look upon because reflected in a golden mirror.

We need to-day specially to learn this lesson—not to envy the rich and great. There is a vast amount of envy in us, stark envy, and we rail at the rich and titled. We give to our envy and selfishness fine names, but at bottom it *is* envy and selfishness. Let us sympathise with the great rather than denounce them. They have mighty losses, intense anxieties, sharp humiliations, terrible temptations and sufferings. They are our brothers in tribulation. “I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men ; for kings, and for all that are in authority ; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.” Let them have a place in our prayers. To pelt them with savage and selfish words is peculiarly unchristian. All that tries us tries them, and tries them on a vast dramatic scale. Let us be content with our lowlier lot. Greatness, opulence, and fame bring more stinging sackcloth.

III

The text suggests a lesson of *sympathy*. We should be much more considerate to people if we

only knew the sackcloth that they wear "within." Wherever we see the signs of affliction our sympathies are drawn out; we pity the blind, we feel for the ragged, we sympathise with those in mourning, but we forget that the great mass of sufferers show no signals whatever of their distress. There is a vast array of mourners, but only few wear their uniform conspicuously. We fall into the error of thinking that everybody about us is happy, fortunate, successful, and that only we ourselves are unlucky and afflicted. But this is a great mistake. Our neighbours on every side have their special difficulties and hardships. We read in the old story: "And Joseph made haste, and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there. And he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself." And thousands of people are like this—they wash their faces, they go out, and refrain themselves. They discharge their daily work, they go about their duties with an aching heart, and an anxious mind kept secret from the world. They sometimes betray it in a look, a sigh, a sentence, a silence, the black garb for a moment accidentally reveals itself, but as a grand rule they fulfil their calling as if nothing were amiss. We should have more sympathy with people if we remembered this. Our smiling, chattering neighbours have secret mortifications, they have fatal diseases upon them, they wrestle with financial perplexities, they mourn love

that has been lost, love that was never won, they are distressed by grievous misunderstandings with friends, they are sore with domestic incompatibilities, they brood over hereditary physical and mental troubles, they feel themselves tracked by evil fortune, they are mysteriously unpopular, they know how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child, they have awoke to find their dream of life for ever beyond realization. "Be patient toward all men." We can never be wrong being patient and sympathetic.

IV

The text points afresh the lesson of *hope*. I. A lesson of hope as we are *sinners*. Jehoram was a sinner; he had been unfaithful before God, hence the troubles which came upon him and upon his city. Disobedience put the sackcloth upon his loins as it did upon the loins of his father Ahab. Sin is very fond of vaunting its wardrobe. What changes of raiment pleasure has laid up in spices! What gorgeous apparel avarice boasts! In what dazzling trappings pride struts! How costly and magnificent are the robes of greatness! But remember that the roughest sackcloth of all is in sin's wardrobe, although the devil never puts it in the shop window. It is the special livery of the servants of sin. They do not always wear it outwardly; no, not by any

means, but they wear it "within." You see the glare and glitter of sin ; you hear its laughter and song ; you wonder at its gay apparel ; but sooner or later it slips on the sackcloth, and it is little matter what you exhibit outside if you wear the fretting thing within. When you are in danger through the bribes of temptation, remember the mortifications of sin, the dishonours of sin, the diseases of sin, the shame, the sufferings and the despairs of sin. When the devil shows you his "fashion plates," ask for a sight of the lacerating sackcloth which is his by letters patent.

But if the king was a sinner, he appears before us in this place as a penitent sinner. His penitence would seem to have been exceedingly imperfect. Some think that his distress of mind was no wholesome fruit of the recognition of his own guilt, but only a consequence of his contemplating the heart-rending misery that now stood before his eyes in all its frightfulness. His rage against the prophet showed the defect of his repentance ; still he was a penitent in some real sense, and God overlooks many defects in our repentance. He humbled himself before God, and God had mercy upon him and upon the city. So let us turn unto the Lord and He will bind us up. By His great power He will break down the tyranny of sin, and give us deliverance from the hand of all our enemies. "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and

to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let us not despair as Jehoram began to despair ; God keeps His word, and though He may seem to delay He will forgive and bless, and in the end you shall rejoice with the Psalmist : " Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing ; Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness."

2. A lesson of hope as we are *sufferers*. In the text the king gives way to terrible anguish, and speaks as if all were lost, yet the salvation of the Lord came. It came late, it came in an unexpected manner, but it came. So shall it be with all who trust God and who wait for Him ; He will turn our sorrow into joy, and for the spirit of heaviness give us the garment of praise. Mind that none of you ever despair. Hope in the darkest hour. He has wonderful ways to comfort, wonderful ways to strengthen, wonderful ways to deliver. And before He has done with us He will take away the sackcloth altogether, and give us white robes and put palms in our hands.

THE AIM OF LIFE

“ She remembereth not her last end ; therefore she came down wonderfully : she had no comforter.”—*Lam.* i. 9.

XVII

THE AIM OF LIFE

I

THE first thing to consider in life is the end of it, its highest and ultimate design. Looking into the future is ever a sign of superiority. Forethought marks the difference between the child and the man. The child takes no distant views, he thinks only of immediate gratification ; a confectionary is more to him now than an estate in reversion ; he prefers a sparrow in the hand to all the singing birds of Europe and all the gorgeous birds of the Orient in the bush of to-morrow ; on the contrary, the man looks into distant years and regulates his present conduct by remote considerations. This looking into the future marks the difference between the savage and the civilized. The barbarian thinks only of immediate fighting and feasting ; if you were to require him to work to-day, or to abstain from feasting, with the promise of large advantage in a year's time, he would not understand you—the savage is the being without a future ; but, on the other hand, the civilized man

recognises the future, lives in the future, is always making sacrifices for the future. This habit of considering the remote often marks the difference between the superior and the inferior classes of civilized society. We look far and wide for the reason why certain classes are wealthy and comfortable whilst others are unsuccessful and destitute ; but is not this inequality often accounted for by the fact that some men think of the future, live for it, restrain and deny themselves for it, whilst men of another type eat and drink to-day and starve to-morrow ?

“Wherefore praise we famous men,
From whose bays we borrow—
They that put aside To-day
All the joys of their To-day,
And with toil of their To-day
Bought for us To-morrow.”

The highest type of men, the highest of all, are those men who fix their eye on the ultimate end of life, on its last and highest design, on its abiding consequence. He who lives a rational and noble life is ever reminding himself of the supreme purpose for which he lives, and he is prepared to make sacrifice to-day that he may find himself honourable and safe in the great future. If life is to prove satisfactory we must from its very beginning contemplate its end and aim. No life can be true and successful that is lived haphazard, lived from hand to mouth, lived at random, disjointed, purposeless. Frith says “An artist must see his picture finished in his mind’

eye before he begins it, or he will never be an artist at all." So, in our ideal, in our mind's eye, we must see our life finished as we begin it, or we shall never be successful in the art of living. The painter cannot go on aimlessly smudging the canvas, adding one blotch of colour to another, and yet turn out a worthy picture ; the organist cannot by striking notes in wild and dreamy improvisation build up any great music ; the preacher cannot take a text, and by a series of unrelated reflections develop an effective discourse. These workers know well enough that a clear conception of the end of their work is essential from its beginning, and that they must regulate the whole effort by their final purpose. So it must be with each of us ; we must know the object of life, its true goal, its plan and programme, its law and prize ; and we must be prepared for diligence and sacrifice so that we may work the glorious thing out worthily and successfully.

II

What, then, must we propose to ourselves as the ultimate end of life ? To what end must we strive, for what end make sacrifices ? If we look around we see that men live for various ends, that they strive to fulfil different ideals. With many it is merely a question of animal indulgence ; others design social pleasure ; the chief delight of life to the sordid crowd

is in seeing "the pile grow" ; some are inspired by ambition ; whilst an elect few supremely desire intellectual excellency and perfection. That brilliant girl Marie Bashkirtseff writes in her diary : " It is the New Year. At the theatre, precisely at midnight, watch in hand, I wished my wish in a single word, intoxicating, whether it be written or spoken—Fame ! " If at the advent of the New Year, precisely at midnight, men should take out their watch and wish the true wish of their heart in a single word, one would cry, Gold ! another, Pleasure ! another, Greatness ! another, Fame ! These would be the intoxicating words breathed from impassioned lips. But surely we ought to have better ideals than these ; other words than these ; more splendid aims, passions and hopes.

We must aim high, aim at the highest, and to do this is to live a truly Christian life. Just now we quoted the painter who said, " The artist must see his picture finished in his mind's eye before he begins it." We see the finished picture in Jesus Christ ; at that we ought to aim, we see there what we ought to be. We have no need to draw upon our imagination, we see the true life, the true spirit, the true character in Him. A life of *consecration*. Christ surrendered Himself to the will of God, and that must be the first thing with us. The biography of one of the old saints commences with his conversion, for, said his biographer, " A man only then begins to live when

he begins to live for God." We must say with our Master, "Lo, I come to do Thy will ; I delight to do Thy will, O my God." We must yield ourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God. A life of *sanctification*. A Christian life is one in which we perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. We must be holy in spirit and conduct. In Jesus we see the picture of the character we must achieve. We want to be like *that*—simple, true, pure in thought and word and deed. This is what we are to live for, to strive after, that we may put on His loveliness, sweetness, greatness ; that we may be found in Him having the righteousness of God. A life of *service*. This is the Christ-like life. Many lives are purely selfish. Some men give nothing ; they consume everything—everything except their own smoke. Ah ! they cannot consume *that*. If the world is no richer for us—for our wealth, our activity, our words, our sympathy, it is all the poorer for our presence ; it gets our smoke, we dim it, darken it, soil it. But every true life, like that of Christ, is a life of loving service ; living truly we live to bless all about us. We are like a dawn, filling the sky with cheerful light ; like a river, making everything to live wherever it flows ; like a tree, stooping with the weight of mellowed blessing ; like a rose, sowing the air with sweetness , like a bird, filling field and forest with music. Here, then is the full, clear,

brilliant picture of what life ought to be—we see it all in clear lines and heavenly colours in Him who set us an example that we might follow in His steps.

“ I have set the Lord always before me.” This is the secret. Not that we may slavishly, technically imitate this or the other act of His as recorded by the Evangelists, but that we so drink into His Spirit that however original our circumstances may be, our temper and conduct may have in them the greatness and beauty of the Divine life, and freely reproduce that life. Our consecration cannot be partial if our eye is fixed on His absolute surrender ; our sanctification cannot be deficient if we live in close fellowship with the sinless One ; our devotion to the good of men cannot lack in enthusiasm if His cross is ever in our view. And let us not easily conclude that we understand Christ fully and that we have seen all His glory. The more closely we study the New Testament, the more rich and wonderful the Lord’s example becomes. Those who have lived the nearest to Him, studied Him the most habitually and closely, are most surprised at the inexhaustible manifoldness and significance of the pattern set forth by God. We have many monographs of Him, but if the whole were written the world would not contain the book. If we were called to study a biography we might master it thoroughly, but the New Testament is not the record of a completed and departed greatness, it is

the revelation of One with the power of an endless life who discloses to successive ages and generations new and sublime teachings. And yet we vainly suppose, because we know a few facts about Christ and a few incidents in His life, that we therefore know Him! Let us with the New Year begin a new intimacy with our Master, and we shall find ourselves day by day awakening to a life far holier and happier than that of past years.

Let us then live to this worthy and glorious end. Let not anything divert us from this vision and hope. This is the mark, the prize of our high calling : to be God's, to be without spot or blemish, to be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

III

Let us pursue the grand end with inextinguishable enthusiasm. All things about us hasten to realize themselves, to fulfil their mission. The trees and flowers go the direct way to perfection ; they waste no time, no sap, no dew, no sunshine ; they are in haste to crown themselves with blossom and fruit. The birds dart on the wing ; the bees follow a straight line to their hive ; it is a libel to call the butterflies capricious — they eagerly fulfil their destiny. The King's business requireth haste, and the whole creation seems to know it. Let us then put resolution and passion into life's grand business.

Some writer says: "It is impossible to do a thing badly that fills your whole soul." Dear brethren, true life is a great business, and it has many difficulties, but it is impossible to do a thing badly that fills your whole soul. Let the love of God, the love of perfection, the love of usefulness possess and inflame you, and you shall triumph over every difficulty and realize your grandest, utmost hope.

If we forget the true aim life must be a constant deterioration and failure. "She remembered not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully." A great lesson is here for the Church. If we forget its grand mission it soon degenerates. A great lesson is here for our nation. If we forget the higher mission of our nation and give place to atheism, materialism, iniquity, we shall come down as Jerusalem did. A great lesson for us personally. We shall sink lower, lower, ever lower. But remembering the great end of life we shall go up wonderfully. All the future will be the growing up into a grander life, a transformation into Christ's image, a realization of His glory and blessedness. Up wonderfully; up into heavenly places out of which we come no more.

This is the last Sunday in the year, but *we have nothing really precious to lose by the lapse of time.* Time will take much from us physically—energy, fulness, bloom; it will take our bright eye, our erect gait, our elastic tread, our firm grasp. It may probably take away from us intellectually. The old

man thinks that he sings, paints, preaches as well as ever he did, and all the while his friends smile. But character abides with us. Age cannot wither this, no time destroy this bloom : it is the bloom of eternity. Moral perfections shine out all the more boldly and brightly as other perfections abate. Some of you have seen those famous gates in Florence which Michael Angelo declared fit for the gates of Paradise. They are covered with exquisite pictures and noble imagery in bronze. Now those gates were once gilded, and Dante speaks of them as "golden gates"; but the centuries have worn away the gold—you can hardly discern a gleaming particle. Still the splendid work of the great artist abides in the solid bronze, looking, perhaps, all the more impressive in its own severe undecorated simplicity. So years rub away the gilt from us all; but inwrought graces, faithful work and noble deeds abide untouched by time and change; these the years cannot mar, they shine forth the more effectually as the fugitive, superficial adornings cease.

We have nothing to lose by the ending of time. The Apostle said, "I have finished my course . . . henceforth there is laid up for me a crown." "Finished." He did not mean that he himself was finished, exhausted, used up, worn out, done with. No; in his view the end of life was its true beginning. Finished, as a splendid dress finished in the making

is ready for scenes of festivity and grandeur ; as a picture finished by the artist is removed from the dirt and lumber of the studio to be hung in glory in some glowing gallery ; finished, as an organ is finished by the builder, awaiting translation to some solemn temple ; finished, as a palace is finished when it is taken possession of by the king. Brethren, we do not work up to a great ideal for the grave-digger to shovel dust upon us and it. Solomon says of the prudent woman : "Strength and honour are her clothing, and she laugheth at the time to come." So is it in a special degree with those who are prudent in the highest sense ; they are clothed with strength and honour, they laugh at the time to come.

THE FICTIONS OF SIN

“On their heads were as it were crowns like gold.”—Rev. ix. 7

XVIII

THE FICTIONS OF SIN

THESE mystical locusts have been very differently construed by various scholars, but it will be better and safer for us to agree that they personify the lusts and passions which destroy the soul, and which therefore destroy all things.

The text suggests that sin affects great things, that it promises great things, and yet fails to give what it promises. The crown it boasts is not real, solid, golden, but a mere figure of speech—"as it were." Sin acts as by an infernal magic ; it is full of illusion, trickery, treason. This is the great lesson we now desire to enforce, namely, that the prizes of transgression and worldliness are the cruellest shams. They look well, they seem splendid, they shine from afar, they captivate the imagination, they kindle ambition and desire, but they lack reality ; when you would lay hold upon them they prove tantalising vapours. The law-breaker never really gets the grand things for which he sold himself—he gets them only "as it were." There is a terrible irony in

sin. It promises a great deal, and in a sense fulfils its promise ; but the fulfilment is altogether satiric and mocking.

“Juggling fiends,
That palter with us in a double sense ;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.”

They promised Adam and Eve that they should “be as gods, knowing good and evil,” and the fulness of the knowledge of the latter has reduced the godship to a sorry dignity ; Achan was tempted by the wedge of gold, and having got it he was compelled to bury it, and then it buried him ; Gehazi was dazzled by a scarlet robe which, in the event, mocked a scaly face ; Judas got the thirty pieces of silver, and they bought a grave ; and so on endlessly. There is a Mephistophelean element in all sin—it is ironical, scornful, derisive ; it is the supreme sophistry and the supreme satire.

I

There is no reality in the *greatness* that men seek in the spirit of selfishness and lust. In the past ages it would seem that Satan himself was betrayed by “the likeness of a kingly crown” ; and evil often appeals to the ambitions and aspirations which are inherent in our nature. But those who yield to temptation find at last that selfish greatness,

soiled greatness, or unrighteous greatness is false greatness, and that it utterly disappoints them after they have made immense sacrifices to secure it.

Take a selfish conqueror, of whom Napoleon is the type. He was himself a locust with a crown upon his head ; and as the locust strips the trees, leaving rich landscapes desolate, so this imperial locust stripped kingdoms, and left behind him a track of blood and ruin. But how empty was all his glory, and how little it came to ! The exile at St. Helena got the crown "as it were." And to-day how completely discredited he is, and beggared all his greatness ! His crown has gone to the pawnbroker ; his empire is broken up ; his dynasty is extinct. In his glory there were no elements of morality, humanity, or godliness ; therefore was he cut off as the foam upon the waters, and his glory was as the fading flower. All generations honour men like Cromwell and Lincoln, who drew the sword for the race ; but the world knows Napoleon for a colossal brigand, and his name is a hissing and a reproach. Take a selfish poet, and let Byron be our typical instance. How much of greatness and fame did this richly gifted genius seem to acquire, and yet how low is the common appraisement of him now ! His career was based on egotism, sensuality, and godlessness, and few care to refer to his tarnished splendour. A pure, wise, moral minstrel like Wordsworth wears a garland of amaranth, but the crown of Byron fades

like a sickly vapour. Lately we read the biography of a notorious politician. He was a brilliant man who loved brilliance. His correspondence is occupied with splendid events, gorgeous pageantries, eloquent orations. He breakfasts with wits, takes tea with duchesses, dines with royalty. You hear much about literature, diplomacy, rank, banquets, theatres, but the great words of righteousness and humanitarianism are hardly breathed. How poor it all is now! How theatrical it looks, and how theatrical it was! We reverence Wilberforce, who secured liberty for the slave; we honour Cobden, who scattered plenty through the smiling land; we love philanthropists like Shaftesbury, who made mercy to distil as gentle rain upon the place beneath. The crowns of these servants of their generation are solid; they glow as they age; but as for the melodramatic statesman his diadem was dust before he was.

It is ever thus. The devil shows the vision of the kingdoms and the glory of them, but he cannot actualize the images with which he charms the fancy. He has only the peep-show. The realities of power and greatness and fame are impossible to lawlessness; the prince of the power of the air only has, only gives, the airy image, the derisive mirage. Whatever is built on egotism, violence, covetousness, or any other form and quality of unrighteousness, inherits only an apparitional crown. Whenever men attempt to acquire a thing in a violent way, or

in a selfish spirit, or for a sensual purpose, all the glory dies out of that thing and it becomes vain, worthless, disgusting, infamous. "The burglar seizes property, but in his hands it is no longer property, only pillage." The sensual man seizes love; but beautiful love thus handled forthwith dies into a ghastly corpse that we know as lust. The ambitious man seizes greatness; but the moment he touches it in the spirit of pride and egotism, the jewelled diadem becomes the symbol of fear and hate. As Garth Wilkinson says: "The coveted thing, whatever it be, loses its essence when the lawless lust has got it." There is nothing acquired by unlawful means, nothing used in an unlawful spirit, nothing devoted to unlawful ends, but its glory, preciousness, sweetness, and strength die out of it, and leave it ghastly and foul as the bones of men. The shape is there, the name is there, but the crown of gold has suffered a change into something strangely worthless and despicable; it is a crown only "as it were."

It is astonishing what a faith we often discover in the possibilities of our nature; what an appetite for greatness and glory! Some years ago a poor woman died, and we saw her carried to the grave from a very lowly home, but her children issued a funeral card and put on it this startling passage: "And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." The exegete

would, of course, ridicule this personal application of the text, and declare that its magnificent symbols stand for some large, cosmical truth ; but at bottom the mourners were right, as was the mother of Zebedee's children, when she coveted dazzling destinies for her sons. The children had a mighty faith in the possibilities of their mother—they felt that she was great enough to have the sun for her robe, the moon for her footstool, with Orion, Venus, Sirius, Arcturus and Aldebaran for the stars of her forehead. The most magnificent things of the Apocalypse do not surprise us ; we have an instinct for greatness. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Let us be sure, however, that we pitch on true greatness. We do not covet the locust's crown, but the crowns won and worn by elders and saints. Let the young men here seek eminence in the path of truth and wisdom and purity. "Wisdom is the principal thing." "She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace : a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee." Let professional men contemplating promotion and distinction—the lawyer, the scientist, the physician, the artist, the politician—be resolved to make no compromise with untruth and unrighteousness ; be ready to decline many crowns, that you may get one that fadeth not away. To political aspirants we say, Bring uncompromising morality and true godliness into all your action and partizanship, or one day you will find that you have altogether missed the

crown, or else got one that is a miserable counterfeit. Work out your aspirations for power and authority and influence on the lines of the fear of God and the rule of righteousness. "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour and immortality, eternal life."

II

There is no reality in the *wealth* that is obtained unrighteously or used selfishly. Wealth without morality, without humanity, without spirituality, is in an extraordinary degree unreal and tantalizing. On the Stock Exchange certain transactions in gold are known as dealings in "phantom gold." The gold exists only on paper, and the whole thing is pure speculation. How much of the wealth of society is "phantom gold"! It is on paper only; there is no substance, no real enrichment and joy.

Look at *illegitimate* wealth—wealth gotten by immoral means. Sometimes when thus procured, dishonest men are detected and deprived of their ill-gotten gains. Many rogues are in prison, and they possess the gold they coveted as the mouse in the trap gets the cheese—"as it were." And if the thief does not suffer such penalty, wealth that comes unworthily has a trick of melting away as fairy gold is said to turn to withered leaves. Conscience, also, does its office, and many who have accumulated for-

tune and live in splendour are utterly incapable of enjoying what they have equivocally realized, seeing they have no sense of self-respect or health of soul.

And there is much the same deception and disappointment in all *unspiritual* wealth. Men have it, and yet have it not. Thousands of rich men, altogether selfish and godless, feel that they are rich as men are rich in dreams. They cannot translate what is conventionally theirs into interior satisfaction, gladness and strength. Splendour and luxury are on every side, but within are emptiness and hunger. Balzac built himself a splendid mansion, but when it was finished he had no money left wherewith to furnish it, and so he proceeded to furnish it in imagination; here, according to a ticket, hung a great picture, there stood a rich cabinet, yonder a superb table—the place fluttered with labels, but the realities were missing. It is much the same with the selfish, unspiritual rich. They have certificates, title deeds, receipts, parchments, bank books declaring the soundness of their investments, the reality of their estate, but their wealth is no fact in their deepest life, there is no corresponding sentiment in their brain and heart.

There is a strange hollowness and falsity about the life of worldly wealth, indulgence and fashion. "They walk in a vain show." The other day I was in the establishment of a jeweller for the theatres, and he showed me the treasures of the stage. What

a size those jewels are ! Mammoth gems, veritable mountains of light, stars of the first magnitude captivate the eye. What rich, sparkling, gorgeous hues those jewels have ! And how they abound ! Pearls, diamonds, rubies ; crowns, mitres, diadems, necklaces lay around as in Oriental dreams. The crown jewels in the Tower look poor in comparison with these decorations of the theatre ; and yet one crown jewel would far more than buy them all. Clever, plausible, enticing as they were, they lacked the real quality and preciousness. One simple, modest, minute gem of royalty outweighs all the gay and garish stones of the mimic kings and queens of the gaslight. And the shows of Vanity Fair are much like these histrionic gauds ; all unspiritual glory, fashion and luxury are mysteriously unreal and unsatisfying. The rich and great and gay, in whose life is no serious principle or purpose, are mere actors whose purple brings them no honour, whose roses have no perfume, whose gold has no purchasing power, whose revelry is a burlesque, whose splendour is a spangle. Contentment, simplicity, kindness, gratitude, purity, temperance, generosity, godliness, love and peace are the solid treasures, gems of God's own jewellery ; and all the unsanctified wealth and glory and joy of the world are cruel fictions, no matter how big and blazing and blatant they may be.

Have no unrighteous wealth ; it will only deceive and curse you. Whatever you get, let it be by

means altogether translucent and honourable. Hold your wealth in the spirit of consecration and unselfishness. No possession is really yours until you realize it in the love of God and man. The real proprietorship is spiritual. Sympathy, devotion, prayer, noble thinking and living turn the corruptible into incorruption. Live in the sense of stewardship, live in the spirit of holiness and love, look through the seen and temporal to the eternal meaning, and the phantom gold shall become real, full of power and sufficiency, moth and rust shall not corrupt, and thieves shall not break through or steal. "The gold of that land is good."

III

There is no reality in the *pleasure* that sin promises. Temptation brings flowers, but they do not delight as do the flowers of the garden of God. Pleasure that is immoral ; pleasure that is selfish ; pleasure that has no thought of God in it ; such pleasure is ever a ghastly fiction. Swan's great picture of the Prodigal Son contains a fine touch. The poor wanderer stands feeding the fierce filthy swine, and the painter has put in one of those poetic touches which make great art and hint so much—here and there a few poppies supply points of colour to the dismal picture. One deep lesson of the parable is expressed in these poppies. The devil

causes men to see wonderful promise in selfish, sensual, godless excitements, but they who yield to temptation find sooner or later, as the prodigal did, that all such pleasure is illusion, delirium, falsehood, leaving only bitterness and ruin. There is no true smile, no radiant joy, no sincere laughter, no satisfaction of the soul in the whole range of unrighteous and unspiritual enjoyment. Physicians tell us that in some skin diseases the riotings of certain parasites give preposterous thrillings of fleshly gratification, and the sufferer screams with hollow laughter occasioned by the writhings of these obscene parasites on the nerve. The laughter of fools, the song of the drunkard, and the mirth of wickedness in general, are also expressions of similar morbidity and disease; they are far removed from the sweet, sane gladness of those whose hearts are pure and whose hands are clean. There is no pleasure beyond the rules of righteousness; there is no pleasure in what injures another; there is no pleasure to him who loves pleasure more than God.

Seek genuine, solid satisfactions. Do not deceive yourselves; do not permit yourselves to be deceived. During his last days Verlaine, the brilliant French poet who recently passed away, was occupied in covering the squalid furniture of his squalid rooms with gold-paint. The reason of the poor fellow was gone, and it pleased his wild eye and disordered fancy to reckon the worthless furniture of his miser-

able lodging as the golden garniture of palaces. So the distempered soul drugged with the opium of vanity and passion looks upon base, vulgar, ugly and ruinous things and habits as altogether beautiful and precious. But Verlaine's yellow furniture did not sell for gold, and the day inevitably comes when those who have lived a worldly and godless life awake to the vanity of the things and pursuits for which they gave and suffered so much. "And it shall even be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite."

"I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Listen to Him. It is in the truth and grace and power of God in Christ that we realize all the rich and enduring satisfactions of the heart. There is no "as it were" in Him. All is reality, immortal reality in His faith and service and hope. "Not as the world giveth give I unto you." No mimic crown, no ghostly garland, no mocking prize. He setteth "a crown of pure gold" on our head, and we reign for ever and ever.

